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THOMAS
COKE

FRANCIS BOURNE UPHAM

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THOMAS COKE

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By

FRANCIS BOURNE UPHAM

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FOREWORD

It is frequently said that the writer of fiction falls in love with his hero. This can also be said of the writer of fact. Such deeds as are recorded in the few pages that follow, such aspirations and holy achievements at a critical period in the history of a militant Church as we see in the life story of the early Methodist itinerants, win and hold the admiration of men who have entered into their labors.

Men who live under sunnier skies than their fathers ever saw, who know nothing of privation worthy the name, and to whom sacrifice means more of pleasure than pain, who have inherited helpful tendencies and a wealth of tradition, to say nothing of material prosperity, are eager to rise to pay their tardy respects to the men who established on firm foundations the Church they love and serve.

A task accepted with much misgiving, and entered upon with the consciousness of loyalty to one's word, has been carried forward, in the preparation of what follows,

with increasing delight and eager study. These pages might well be styled an appreciation rather than a record.

Most surely it is understood that the larger biographies of Dr. Coke—that of Mr. J. W. Etheridge most especially—furnish the basis for all that has been said. Dr. Coke's Journal, a few of his discourses, his life by Samuel Drew, and the histories and biographies that deal with this period have been freely consulted.

'Tis the hope of the writer of this little book that Thomas Coke may find as warm a place in the regard of those who read these pages as he holds in the heart of him who has written them.

CHAPTER I

THE ENGLAND OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

THOMAS COKE stands well toward the front in a class of men made great by conditions that made other men small. He lived unsullied amid the immoral influences of his day, rejected in early life the teachings of a heartless, thoughtless Church, and overcame opposition that caused many a lesser man to yield in despair. He was strengthend by the testing that weakened others—grew great in spite of his surroundings; indeed, it could be said of him as it could be said only of men of heroic mold, he grew great because of them.

England during the latter half of the eighteenth century was no friend to grace to bear one on to God, though it was not openly a foe. It had its schools and its churches. Its colleges bore the most sacred names and made the highest professions. It was to Jesus College that Thomas Coke, when a lad of sixteen, was sent; and it was to Christ Church College that John Wesley

came from the Charterhouse School in 1720. To Jesus and to Christ! Surely in name nothing of high profession was lacking. But the name was all. "Never shall a child of mine enter a public school or university," writes Southey. "Perhaps I may not be able so well to instruct him in logic or in languages, but I can at least preserve him from vice." Pride and haughtiness of spirit, impatience and peevishness, sloth and indolence, gluttony and sensuality were specifically charged by Mr. Wesley as characteristic of the life of the college of his day. So was it with the Church. It was false to its call. It took the name of God in vain, and its profanity was not limited to the occasional use of terms of condemnation rarely heard in the pulpit of to-day. Its whole life was a shattering of the commandment for serious reverence. Laughter greeted the man who dared to talk of religion. The Bible was largely an unknown book. Purity and honesty of purpose on the part of the clergy were sadly lacking. One day when Dr. Coke was a student he heard a sermon that touched him; but to his amazement he learned by the frank admission of the clergyman who had preached it that not a word of it was believed to be

true. Unreality and dishonesty, sham and shallowness were manifest in the lives of the men who were called to speak of the deep things of God and to present the truth concerning an eternal destiny. It is not to be wondered at that Thomas Coke felt for a time during his struggle for a creed that it was better to doubt than to believe. Over many a pulpit might well have been written the sentence, "Many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of."

As it was with creed, so was it with conduct, for a dishonest belief ever makes for dishonorable behavior. "Purity and fidelity to the marriage vow," says Green in his History of the English People, "were sneered out of fashion; and Chesterfield in his letters to his son instructs him in the art of seduction as part of a polite education." Dr. Coke tells of scenes during his college days that he did not dare to describe—midnight revels upon which one shrinks to enter even for a moment under the guidance of a chastened imagination. Against such a background sinners according to the standards of our purer day stand out as saints; and saints—the enthusiastic, ascetic youth of the Holy Club, for example

—deserve the traditional halo. How a lad with the normal tempestuous tendencies of youth could withstand the world, the flesh, and the devil on a field where defeat was the fashion, the standards were trailed in the dust, and the leaders were either cowards or hypocrites, is more than most of us can understand. "By the grace of God I am what I am," was undoubtedly the favorite text of many an itinerant preacher as he made his way unharmed and unspotted through a sinning world.

Thomas Coke did this. Said Bishop Asbury when the news of the death of his associate reached him, "He was a minister of Christ, in zeal, in labor, and in services the greatest man of the last century." "It is of little consequence," said Dr. Coke as he set out for India in 1813, "whether we take our flight to glory from the land of our nativity, from the trackless ocean, or the shores of Ceylon." He never doubted that his flight would be to glory: to doubt would have been disloyalty.

His good birth undoubtedly had much to do with the mastery of his maturer life. He was born in Brecon, Wales, October 9, 1747. His father was a physician, successful and most highly respected. "He was

the beloved and honored patriarch of his borough," says Bishop Hurst, "as his epitaph in the priory church tells." What there was—indeed, what there is—in the Welsh blood that makes for spirituality we do not know; but 'tis safe to say that there is something. From one county in Wales—the county of Brecknock—there came many of the great men of early Methodism. "It supplied the first evangelist, Harris; the first martyr, Seward; and the first hymnist, Williams. It found Charles Wesley an ideal wife; it gave Wesleyan Methodism the 'Father of Missions,' Dr. Coke; it was Joseph Pilmoor's circuit before he, with Richard Boardman, went to America, in 1769." So writes Bishop Hurst in his History of Methodism. "A grand succession of saintly men ministered in the old Brecon Chapel," says the Rev. T. Wynne Jones in the Methodist Recorder of 1896: "Harris, the pioneer of Methodist open-air preaching; Whitefield, the Baptist of Methodism; Charles Wesley, the psalmist of the revival; Coke, the indomitable missionary; Fletcher, the saintly theologian; Benson, the erudite commentator; . . . and Wesley himself." His good birth undoubtedly had much to do with his subsequent mastery

over temptations and triumph on a field where others met disaster. He was trained and well trained too—to use the oft-quoted word of Oliver Wendell Holmes—one hundred years before he was born. He entered life with the heritage of a good name, good ancestry, and good atmosphere. To breathe for generations the pure air of God's heavens as it swept over the mountains of Wales, to look year after year toward the hills whence comes man's help, is to be favored of God. Enthusiasm amid such scenes is native and normal. A singing, shouting faith; a belief in large truth; a readiness to dare great things for God, are met amid such surroundings even among the unhonored and unknown. They are met to-day; they may be met to-morrow; they surely were met in the days when the Methodist itinerants first came shouting the good news of a salvation that man might know to be his for time and eternity. "He was a foe to all enthusiasm," wrote an old Puritan over the tomb of his friend on Copps Hill, Boston. 'Tis safe to say that neither the man who wrote the sentence nor the man whose virtues he sought to describe came from Wales. Happy the pastor even to-day who has in his membership men from

this little principality, away from the beaten path of the tourist; the land of song and shout, of dream and vision, of exultant saints and audacious sinners; the land where one must be extravagant in speech even to pronounce the name of the little village where he spends the night. Through the years of his youth—and his father's youth before him—Thomas Coke lived amid such scenes. It was from a home blessed by such influences that he came to Oxford to be enrolled as a gentleman commoner at the age of sixteen.

Men whose names are unknown—ever will be unknown—undoubtedly had much to do with the holy momentum in the life of the lad who came to godless Oxford in 1763. The humble Christian who says little but whose deeds loom large, whose education knows nothing of books but whose experience with the great verities of life is rich and deep, who never puts pen to paper but who offers spontaneous testimony to the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ which seems because of its power and beauty to have come through divine inspiration—such a man is said to have made a deep impression at a critical time a few years later on the life of Thomas Coke. "It

was to the pious and communicative simplicity of this happy rustic," writes Mr. Drew, "that Dr. Coke declared he owed greater obligations with respect to finding peace with God and internal tranquillity of soul than to any other person." The history of the early Methodist movement will never be written so long as the worth of the humble layman remains unknown. The effect upon the life of the common people of the truth proclaimed by Mr. Wesley and his followers, the effect that was shown in daily conduct and abiding character, the transformation of the sinner into the saint, this had more to do with the making of the life of many a man than the best of preaching. Charles Wesley declared that he received the witness of the Holy Spirit in May, 1738, through the agency of a poor mechanic named Bray. He says of him that he "knew nothing except Christ." The first sermon preached in America by Francis Asbury—and his choice bears testimony to the thought of the humble people from whom he came—was from the text, "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." The man who has never entered history made history; the layman whose name may never be known

till the great day when deeds are disclosed and heaven's estimate of character revealed, this man or the class he represents made many a preacher. Several years ago a traveler came to a little village in England that was strikingly unlike any of the villages about it. Sobriety, cleanliness, and piety were manifest everywhere. "What is the explanation of all this?" said he to an old man whom he met. "One hundred years ago," was the ready answer, "there came to this town a man by the name of John Wesley."

To such a town, to villages alive and aglow with the consciousness that God had visited his people, as well as to towns deep in sin, Thomas Coke must have frequently come. He must have seen what Methodism could do long before he knew what Methodism was. He must have noticed the life of the humble follower long before he met the leader. On the page of history cause and effect change places with bewildering rapidity. Thomas Coke did much for the England of his day; England of the eighteenth century did much for Thomas Coke.

The direct purpose and immediate call of God most surely cannot be overlooked.

Even if one had the puerile thoughtlessness that might lead him to do so, he could not ignore this if he paid any heed to the words of simple trust in the guidance of God that animated Thomas Coke. "I am now dead for Europe, but alive for India," wrote he in 1813. "God himself has said to me, 'Go to Ceylon.' I am so fully convinced of the will of God that methinks I had rather be set naked on the coast of Ceylon and without a friend than not go there." He believed as did his great associates in the direct and minute guidance of God. He could hardly do otherwise. God must be everything to men who lead over an untrodden path, or nothing. He must be near by when a sparrow falls, and a raven calls for food, as well as when a planet starts to swing through space. "He lived in a world of wonders and divine interpositions," writes John Richard Green of Mr. Wesley. "It was a miracle if the rain stopped and allowed him to set forward on a journey. It was a judgment of Heaven if a hailstorm burst over a town which had been deaf to his preaching. One day he tells us when he was tired and his horse fell lame, 'I thought, "Cannot God heal either man or beast by any means as without any?"—

immediately my headache ceased and my horse's lameness in the same instant.'" Thomas Coke was a Christian of the same school.

Therefore, behind the lad setting forth from his simple life to meet the strain of college days in an age godless and immoral, amid surroundings where true piety was rarely seen, there must be placed the guiding hand of God, who loved his Church, honored prayer, recognized the need of specially chosen leaders in every generation who could hold forth Heaven's ideals and never waver if men failed to see them. A good home, godly associates at the critical period of search for truth, and God Almighty calling and caring for him gave him the victory over the foibles and sins of the day and made him a leader unsurpassed by those who have followed after him.

CHAPTER II

IDEALS OF EDUCATION—OXFORD, COKESBURY

"Dr. Coke wanted a college," writes Asbury in his Journal on the receipt of the news of the burning of Cokesbury College on December, 1795. "I wished only for schools. Dr. Coke wanted a college."

The early Methodists gave it to him. No sooner had Thomas Coke reached America than he formulated a plan for our first educational institution. "At the first interview of Coke with Asbury, at Barratt's Chapel," says Dr. Stevens, "Asbury submitted the proposition to the doctor, who zealously approved it, and procured from the Christmas Conference a vote that it should be immediately attempted as a collegiate establishment. Nearly five thousand dollars were quickly raised for the purpose."

But there are colleges and colleges. There is the university where personality is everything, with the student at one end of a log and Mark Hopkins at the other, and the university with numberless appli-

ances and technical aids, laboratories and libraries, administrative buildings and dormitories furnished for the most fastidious taste. Between them are many humble institutions doing good work with a varying conception of education or the means of securing it.

In this middle class—not far removed from the simpler extreme—was the college of early American Methodism. Its curriculum was simple but its requirements were complex to the most minute detail. The Discipline for 1789 tells us the aims and the methods adopted—if not adapted—to secure them. "Our first object shall be to answer the design of Christian education by forming the minds of the youth, through divine aid, to wisdom and holiness; by instilling into their tender minds the principles of true religion, speculative, experimental, and practical, and training them in the ancient way, that they may be rational scriptural Christians. . . . It is also our particular desire that all who shall be educated in our college may be kept at the utmost distance as from vice in general, so in particular from softness and effeminacy of manners."

One would judge from the regulations laid down by the Rev. Mr. Heath, the first

president, that the intent of the Church was carried out not only in spirit but in letter. "Students were required to rise at five o'clock in the morning, summer and winter," writes Dr. Stevens, "and to be in bed at nine o'clock, 'without fail'; to study seven hours a day, with intervals of exercise or recreation, three hours being given to dinner and its following recreations." It is refreshing to note in the midst of such detailed statements of the manner of life required—details more minute even than those suggested in the quotation from the Discipline—that there is a dignity of purpose worthy the vision of more enlightened days. If the methods adopted seem petty, if not unworthy, the object leaves nothing to be desired. Instruction was to be in studies "more especially necessary for a new-settled country"—in those important arts that might "be an effectual method of rendering them (the students) more useful to their country." Patriotism and piety went hand in hand in the early Methodist Church. Though the students were forced to rise at five o'clock, it was for their country's sake! Our most modern critic of the tendency of college life to separate a man from the strenuous duties of the toilers of

his generation might well take notice of the pathetic nobility of this little college of early Methodism.

The explanation of much of this—its narrowness and its nobility—may be seen quite largely in the Oxford to which Thomas Coke was sent in 1763. We see Cokesbury if we see Oxford; and we see Methodism of a thousand schools if we see the aim and spirit, if not the narrowness, of Cokesbury.

Surely the explanation of the narrowness and asceticism so unthinkingly resented by most of us may be found in Oxford. The simple law of the pendulum controls in ideals of education as in almost every sphere of activity. To think to the limit of laxity to-day means to leap to the limit of prudery to-morrow. To see the horrors of vice in Oxford, means to see a little later the horrors of untempered virtue in Cokesbury. To begin life among youths "who think themselves obliged in honor and common civility to make you damnable drunk, and to carry you, as they call it, a corpse to bed"—to use the English and ideas of a writer of that day—is to end it among lads of "tender minds," sleeping, according to college regulations deliberately advanced, "on mattresses, not on feather beds." To see the

wild excesses of youth sunk in shameless animalism, means of necessity to see in some Kingswood school what Mr. Wesley tried in vain to bring about—a group of lads who never play. "They ought never to play," says Mr. Wesley, "but they do every day; yea, in the school."

Oxford during the latter half of the eighteenth century was not the Oxford of to-day. "At no period in their history had the English universities sunk to a lower condition of education than at the time when Gibbon went up to Oxford," writes James Cotter Morison in the "English Men of Letters" series. Gibbon was born in 1737, only ten years earlier than Thomas Coke; came to the university at the age of fifteen, and entered also as a gentleman commoner. The conditions met by one of the lads were practically the same, therefore, as those met by the other. "To speak of them as seats of learning seems like irony; they were seats of nothing but coarse living and clownish manners. . . . Youths like Gray and West, fresh from Eton, express themselves with contempt for their respective universities. 'Consider me,' says the latter writing from Christ Church, 'very seriously. Here is a strange country in-

habited by things that call themselves Doctors and Masters of Arts, a country flowing with syllogisms and ale; where Horace and Virgil are equally unknown.'" Gibbon could say the same of Magdalen. "To the University of Oxford," he writes, "I acknowledge no obligation. . . . I spent fourteen months at Magdalen College; they proved the most idle and unprofitable of my whole life."

"I doubt not you had a dunce for a tutor at Cambridge, and so set out wrong," writes Mr. Wesley to one of his preachers in a letter brought to light and printed for the first time a year or so ago. "Did he never tell you that of all men living a clergyman should talk with the vulgar? Yea, and write, imitating the language of the common people, though, so far as consists with purity and propriety of speech? Easiness, therefore, is the first, second, and third points, and stiffness, apparent exactness, artificialness of style the main defects to be avoided next to solecism and impropriety. You point wrong, Sammy. You aim at a wrong mark. If he was a standard for anyone (which I cannot possibly allow), yet Dr. Middleton is no standard for a preacher; no, not for a preacher before the

university. His diction is stiff, formal, affected, unnatural. The art glares, and therefore shocks a man of true taste. Always to talk or write like him would be as absurd as always to walk in minuet step. O, tread natural, tread easy, only not careless. Do not blunder into impropriety. If you will imitate, imitate Dr. Swift or Mr. Addison. You will then both save trouble and do more good." Probably Mr. Wesley might have said the same of instruction at Oxford. Neither university had a monopoly of dunces or men who talked and wrote as absurdly as the man who always walked in minuet step. All this must be remembered when we seek to find a cause for the painstaking detail of some of the early Conferences or for the character of Mr. Wesley's conversations with his preachers. He felt the need of training the men who were to bear the message to the people that Methodism had to present. Tyerman says of Mr. Wesley's work in 1777, "He also spent an hour every morning with his London preachers, in instructing them as he used to instruct his Oxford pupils." If he did for them what he had been accustomed to do for the Oxford students, it is safe to say that they were well trained. Evidently,

however, he was an exception to the rule. Dr. Middleton and Mr. Wesley—one in Cambridge, the other in Oxford—mark the extremes.

This being the character of the work, it is hardly to be wondered at that the biographer of Gibbon says that the lad was "thrust into Oxford by a careless father." The same writer would undoubtedly say the same of the father of Thomas Coke.

Still, if the education was poor, it was the best obtainable. In great sections of the land there was practically no education whatever—or none that deserved the name. At the end of the eighteenth century not one in twenty could read or write, and only sixty years ago three out of every ten married men were unable to sign their names to the marriage register. It was the best education obtainable, though painfully lacking in the extent of subjects considered, in honesty and ability on the part of the teacher, and in the quiet, unobtrusive, unconscious guidance of the lives of the students—that guidance that is both a safeguard and an inspiration. A satirist of the day blames most bitterly the dons for "covetousness, greed, dissipation, rudeness, and stupidity." "Here and there," writes one

as if he were sounding a note of unique commendation, "here and there a tutor would try to do his duty by his pupil." Gray writes to West, "When we meet it will be my greatest of pleasures to know what you do, what you read, and how you spend your time, and to tell you what I do not read, and how I do not, etc.; for almost all the employment of my hours may be best explained by negatives." Robert Southey says of his Oxford days, "All I learnt was a little swimming and a little boating. I never remember to have dreamt of Oxford—a sure proof of how little it entered into my moral being; of school, on the contrary, I dream perpetually."

Yet from Oxford there came the inspiration to young Coke that summoned him to nobility of aim as well as the readily accepted suggestions of narrowness of conduct. Youth sees quite largely what it wants to see. It is the age of divine imagination. Old Sam Johnson held ever in most tender remembrance his pitiably poor and ragged days, his crude and rude experiences at Pembroke College. "Sir," said he, speaking once most tenderly of his college life, "we are a nest of singing birds." So thought and felt John Wesley. "I love

the very sight of Oxford," said he when an old man. So undoubtedly did Thomas Coke. Otherwise we cannot conceive of the cause of his eager desire to establish a university, even against the advice of Francis Asbury, as soon as he came to the shores of America.

We must remember that Thomas Coke was of the temperament most easily susceptible to the indefinable charms and beckoning graces of college scenes. He was affectionate, generous to a fault, blessed with a "vein of simplicity running through his nature such as sometimes marks the highest genius." He could see the beauties concealed as well as those disclosed, beauties that seemed the more attractive because concealed. He could live in a world of imagination as could the young Coleridge, who made his way one day along the Strand blissfully dreaming and living out his dream in action till rudely checked by one who thought he was trying to pick his pocket—blissfully dreaming that he was Leander swimming the Hellespont.

Thomas Coke's varied life in later years shows the effect that the unseen—the land just ahead of him, the fertile valley just over the hill—always had upon him. Never

could he become aquainted with one situation than he wanted to find another one. When once he knew England, he must know Ireland. When Ireland was his, he must have America. When America lay before him as a God-given field, he must cry out for India. Eighteen times did he cross the Atlantic, and when sixty-six years of age dared to set forth for an untried venture among unknown people thousands of miles from the home of his youth and vigorous maturity. To him Oxford must have meant more than a field of sordid sensuality and shallow instruction. He saw what it might be—and what soon it was; he saw what it had been. He learned ever by contrast, not comparison. He had no Holy Club of associates, but found choice spirits among those who had lived before him.

That we may know all that Oxford was to him we must not only see his temper and training, but also his sacrifices as a ceaseless itinerant. Coke was denied in later life close association with scholarship and culture. He was too busy a man, too much a man of the people, too pre-eminently a man of deeds, not to cherish most lovingly the golden days of dreamy

youth. To him, as to John Wesley and to others who followed humbly after them, Oxford meant everything.

Because of this Oxford must ever mean much to Methodism. It should not be forgotten that Mr. Wesley surrendered to Asbury and Coke the control of the societies in America. It should not be forgotten that Mr. Asbury said, "The Lord called not Mr. Whitefield nor the Methodists to build colleges. If any man should give me ten thousand pounds per year to do and suffer what I have done for that house" (Cokesbury College) "I would not do it." It should not be forgotten that Thomas Coke offered the first prayer and preached the first sermon on the sacred soil of an American Methodist college.

Surely, it is no little thing that Methodism had such a man sent of God to shape its early policy even though he was taken away by what to our imperfect vision seems an untimely death. The debt we owe old Oxford—the debt we owe to the Oxford purified by the mystical heaven-sent powers of youth of the dross that the historian of calmer days must see—that debt we can never pay; and that debt is our glory.

It was not a "careless father," but a

divinely guided one, that sent out from Brecon, Wales, a rosy-cheeked, black-eyed, black-curly-haired boy to the university town where other lads met their ruin. It was the God of all wisdom who guided young Coke that he might get the love for learning that made him next to Wesley the scholar of early Methodism, and enabled him to furnish an incentive to countless humbler men of his own and succeeding generations.

CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE OF GREAT MEN—THE WESLEYS

To know Thomas Coke we must not only know the England of his day and the extent and characteristics of his education, but also the men with whom he associated. We must know John Wesley and his gifted brother Charles, and have at least a speaking acquaintance with a score of others who belonged to the inner circle of chosen friends.

More than this. We must know, if possible, what Thomas Coke thought of them—or how he thought of them; for as a rule a man is revealed in the opinion he holds of those who are nearest to him. That opinion need not be directly or frequently expressed: indeed, 'tis most suggestive when it is not. If one keep fellowship with large men and fail to recognize that they are great, or refer to the fact if recognized, he belongs to one of two classes: he is pitiably small or as great as the men with whom he may be compared. It is for this reason that

no man's life can be written well till long after he is gone. Little men fail to recognize the marks of nobility—the valet class is large even in a democratic age—and large men think the nobility of the men they meet a mere matter of course.

Thomas Coke had little to say of the great men he knew; this fact is immediately and most suggestive. Indeed, they had little to say of him. True, late in life he wrote a Life of Wesley, but who knows of it? Who can see in it what a smaller man than Coke would have been compelled to tell? He was a fairly prolific writer, publishing sermons and letters and discourses according to the habits of his day. He wrote a Commentary on the Holy Scriptures in six volumes; sermons on the Divinity of Christ, the Witness of the Spirit, the Christian Ministry; a History of the West Indies in three volumes; and many Letters to the Societies. He wrote much, but did not write of that which he knew the most, or if he wrote did not so present the fact as to give a living picture of beauty and force.

Not that he did not believe the Wesleys and their associates to be large men. Far from it. Wesley writes in his Journal for

August 13, 1776: "I preached at Taunton, and afterward went with Mr. Brown to Kingston. Here I found a clergyman, Dr. Coke, late gentleman commoner of Jesus College in Oxford, who came twenty miles on purpose to meet me. I had much conversation with him, and a union then began which I trust shall never end."

Twenty miles to meet him! Yes, and more than twenty miles. Thomas Coke went far enough that day to cross the line that separated ease from hardship, formalism from fervor, the dead past from the living present. Only a little later Mr. Wesley writes, "I went to Taunton with Dr. Coke, who being dismissed from his curacy, has bid adieu to his honorable name and determined to cast in his lot with us." Thomas Coke surely believed with all the intensity of a great heart in John Wesley. In 1784 he writes to him, "If the awful event of your decease should happen before my removal to the world of spirits, I should have business enough of indispensable importance on my hands in these kingdoms." The possibility of the death of John Wesley was an "awful event" from which he shrank. And well he might. Few men have lived who have equaled him in ability, sincerity,

and tireless energy. Still fewer have brought these characteristics to situations so strikingly in need of them. Still fewer have had the power to inspire men to follow so closely in their steps, or to believe so tenaciously the truths they proclaimed. Every now and then a great man appears ahead of his times or out of accord with his surroundings. He thinks as the wise men a hundred years after his day may think, or as wise men thousands of miles away are thinking. Every now and then a wise man fails in sincerity of purpose and men distrust him; if once he lose his grasp on the confidence of the people he cannot get it again. Every now and then a great and good man seems prematurely summoned from the field of action. There is no Church nor cause that has not mourned bitterly at times because a leader of large promise has been taken. Mr. Wesley, however, lived long and well, and few have equaled him in native ability or the accumulation of wisdom and knowledge. His Church—the Church which bears his name—has given to the cause of Christ large men, but none larger than its founder. Well might Thomas Coke shrink from losing John Wesley!

Yet he said little of him. A few citations from many letters, a biography that was written twenty years after John Wesley's death, a funeral sermon—something, 'tis true, but not what one might well desire from a man who knew so much. The truth of it is, as has been said, Thomas Coke was too much like his great associates in thought, word, and deed, in aim and achievement, to realize their full grandeur.

He also was preëminently a man of action. If John Wesley could go up and down through three kingdoms spending and being spent in the Master's service, preaching more than forty thousand sermons during fifty years of tireless and unwavering loyalty, traveling a quarter of a million of miles in the day when the best conveyance was the rumbling coach, proudly called for its rapidity a "flying machine"—if Mr. Wesley was always on the move, so was Dr. Coke. It was the day of deed, not of word. Profession meant much, as the discussions and definitions of the day—the debates and well-nigh acrid differences of friends—would indicate. Profession meant much, but profession unaccompanied by action in close harmony with it was to them detestable. It was a day of discipline because

it was a day of deed. It was the day of denial unrecognized and so unrecorded. Generosity, the report of which to-day would secure a special right of way over the cables that lie on the bed of the ocean, or through the currents of the air that modern thrift has at last utilized, during the days of the Wesleys passed unnoticed. Thomas Coke gave away a fortune, and no man thought of it. Later he came into possession of another, which he speedily gave away. Still, no man spoke of it. Later he gave away a third fortune—and some one was small enough to take note of it. What lives of these men might have been written if men of modern caliber had been near them. In 1794 the Church owed Dr. Coke eleven thousand dollars for an overdraft out of his own funds for the cause of missions during the previous year. He quietly canceled the debt when he found it out. "It is doubtful," says Stevens, "whether any Protestant of his day contributed more from his own property for the spread of the gospel."

He was ordained to the priesthood in 1772, but his ordination was one of form rather than recognized grace. He accepted a curacy in South Petherton, Devon, and

at once entered upon his duties with fidelity. His meeting with Mr. Wesley at Taunton marks an epoch in his life. He returned to his work a new man. His vicar was startled by his earnestness, and in perplexity, if not terror, dismissed him. In 1777 he was invited by Mr. Wesley to join the Conference. From that day to the day of his death he was a tireless and triumphant itinerant. Mr. Wesley, however, was not quite sure of him at first. "Dr. Coke promises fair," he writes to a friend in Brecon, "and gives us reason to hope that he will bring forth not only blossoms, but fruit. He has hitherto behaved exceeding well and seems to be aware of his grand enemy—applause. He now stands on slippery ground and is in need of every help." Such suspicion—if the word is not too strong to express a leader's caution—so far as John Wesley was concerned was speedily dispelled. It was not so with Charles Wesley. "I was perhaps as well acquainted with the two brothers as any man living," says Mr. Pawson, one of the early preachers. "That Mr. Charles Wesley was a man of a very suspicious temper is certainly true, and that Mr. John Wesley had far more charity in judging of persons in general (except the

rich and great) than his brother had is equally true."

Probably 'tis unfortunate for the reputation of Charles Wesley that he is always compared with his brother John. They were alike in nobility and zeal for the kingdom of Christ, but they were unlike in other characteristics. Said John Wesley once in speaking of the days of their early ministry, "My brother Charles would say, 'Well, if the Lord would give me wings I would fly.' I used to say, 'Brother, if he bid me fly I would trust him for the wings.'" Charles also took note of the points of dissimilarity. "My brother," said he, "is all hope; I am all fear." Yet even so, John Wesley lived magnificently in the day of action, not dream; and Charles Wesley sang as if he never knew the meaning of doubt or discouragement. And what a song he sang! Who has equaled him? Surely, in quantity of work, no one. In 1868 there were published thirteen volumes of the poetical work of John and Charles Wesley, very largely the work of Charles—nearly six thousand pages. Surely, in quantity, no one; and in quality too. So long as men know sin and strive to know the Saviour from sin, so long as prayer

seeks utterance in noble verse—great in thought and grand in presentation of the same—so long as men are burdened and heartbroken, so long as the Spirit of God summons them to worship, just so long will men cherish Charles Wesley's hymn, "Jesus, Lover of my Soul," a hymn admitted to be unsurpassed, if not unrivaled, save by the inspired psalms of David.

One wonders if Dr. Coke's ambition to be also among the poets had anything to do with the reluctance of Charles Wesley to accord him leadership. Very likely not; yet he dared to dream of such a blissful state. One of the dusty volumes that are looked at to-day with curiosity commingled with reverence is Dr. Coke's version of the "Life of Christ," a poem written by the Rev. Samuel Wesley, father of John and Charles. One reads upon the title-page concerning the poem that it was "corrected, abridged, enlarged by much original matter, and presented to the public in an almost entire new dress by Thomas Coke." Charles might well look askance at the man who would dare "correct, abridge, and enlarge" a poem by one of the Wesleys, even though he had not as yet made the attempt.

Dr. Coke's love for the lay preacher had probably much to do with this feeling. Having gone as far as he had—having hesitated not when hooted out of town, having gone forth deliberately into a world-wide parish amid the discordant clanging of the bells of the church where he had first led men in worship—it is not to be wondered at that he was willing to go to any extreme for the furtherance of his cause. Gladly did he hail the coming of the lay itinerant to the pulpit of City Road; though Charles Wesley bitterly resented it. It was not until the trustees of City Road waited upon Charles Wesley with the blunt request that he make way for gifted men who were unordained that he yielded. It was this quick recognition of the new force available for the public ministry of Christ that made Dr. Coke so heartily in sympathy with the most advanced views of early Methodism. He was a man of deeds that knew no precedent.

Also he was a man of deep affection and great emotion. So were all of them—all these leaders. Their portraits call for all the rich colors rather than the tender and delicate shades that blend in two or three. "Wesley," says Tyerman, "was naturally

irritable, but even that was better than being apathetic. 'Tommy,' said Wesley once, 'touch that,' pointing to a dock. The itinerant did so. 'Do you feel anything?' asked Wesley. 'No,' replied his friend. 'Touch that,' continued Wesley, pointing to a nettle. His companion obeyed, and in consequence was stung. 'Now, Tommy,' remarked Wesley, 'some men are like docks; say what you will to them, they are stupid and insensible. Others are like nettles; touch them and they resent it. Tommy, you are a nettle; and for my part I would rather have to do with a nettle than a dock.' "

So would most of us. The man who loves much—who can love much—is the man who can hate heartily as well, and who has to struggle right royally not to do so. Even these differences—not to use a harsher word—are marks of nobility. Surely they are if the differences that descend to dissensions are bitterly regretted; and in the case of these men they were. Human nature was not unknown to them through close contact, and their frank admissions of frailty were genuinely sincere. "I the chief of sinners am," said John Wesley when dying. He meant it just as surely as he did the next

glowing sentence—"but Jesus died for me." Sincerity with the Wesleys was a cardinal virtue.

It is this depth of affection that sent Methodism out to a sinning world with a song and a shout and a simple message of immediate salvation. Methodism walked the Emmaus road with Cleopas and Luke after the vision at the breaking of the bread. The Church and civilization to which it brought its message still moved forward into the lengthening shadows not knowing the Stranger with whom they journeyed. Methodism leaped to find men who were saying, "The Lord is risen indeed," with a heart that glowed with a new-found reality. They were men of deepest emotion. This we see especially in their hymns. If Thomas Coke did not write them he used them, and, as has been said, saw nothing peculiar in the temper or exultant tone that all of them know. He loved the Lord Jesus Christ and exulted in the opportunity of saying so. He was happy when he had an audience of men to whom the good news came for the first time. He was happiest when that audience was made up of sinners sunk in depravity unspeakable who most needed the message of grace. The fact that

Coke could keep close fellowship with men who so thought and felt and not wonder at what he found, or shout to the world the essential facts of his discovery, is proof that he was gloriously like them. A little man would not have seen this; a large man of caliber and conduct like their own might have thought of it, but would take it as a matter of course. A mediocre man alone could see it and report it so that others might see it too. It was because Boswell was a man of moderate ability that we see Dr. Johnson as he was. Men of the Boswell type could have written great lives of Wesley and Coke; but men of that type rarely concerned themselves with the self-denying Methodists.

Yes, to know Thomas Coke we must read more than one biography. We must know what others said of him, and also what he said of others. Better still, we must know what he did not say, what he evidently considered as normal and worthy a sinner saved by grace. We must know a man by the company he keeps and by his failure to say anything of it. He was a great man among great men.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IN THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH

Dr. Coke took his Bachelor's degree at Oxford on February 4, 1768, when a lad but little more than twenty years of age. He returned immediately to Brecon, his home, and entered upon the life of a country gentleman, well educated and with fortune amply sufficient to meet both need and cultivated taste. He is described to us by Mr. J. W. Etheridge, one of his most appreciative biographers, as a man of "great gracefulness of form, features beautifully regular and lighted sometimes by a smile which seemed like a flash of sunshine, dark eyes radiant with vivacity, a brow white as alabaster and overhung with masses of black hair which descended in clustering curls on his shoulders."

If he had any desire to remain in seclusion, taking his ease with dignity, a favored son in a sheltered home, a gentleman of leisure, his neighbors saw to it that the wish be not gratified. He was immediately

chosen a common councilor, and within four years was elected to the office of chief magistrate of the town, an office which he filled with signal ability. For three years after this he delayed meeting the conclusion that he had foreseen as well-nigh inevitable even during the days of his doubt, if not disbelief, while at Oxford. From his earliest youth he had been accustomed to think of the possibility of his taking at last holy orders and entering the ministry of the Church. The death of two older brothers had left his parents ready and eager to lavish a wealth of love upon the child whom God gave them to take their places. Unceasing prayer to God arose that he might guide their only son to noble manhood. To the mother of Thomas Coke, as well as to his father—even more so—if there be anything in heredity and early training, too much credit cannot be given. We are told that he was dedicated to God, even to service at his altar, at an early age. The father lived to see him a clergyman of the Established Church; the mother lived to see him and to honor him as a Methodist itinerant.

During his last days of undergraduate life he had turned in desperation to the writings of some of the great English

leaders of the Christian faith. A book by Bishop Sherlock on the Trial of the Witnesses and a treatise by Dr. Witherspoon on Regeneration were of inestimable value to him. "I had the struggle to myself," writes one who at the same time forced his way through to faith, "I was alone. I knew no one who believed." It is of the mercy of God that Thomas Coke turned to meet the inspiration that ever hovers, as does the halo round the brow of a saint, over the pages of a good book. Over many a book now dusty and neglected, young men in other days lingered lovingly and prayerfully as they sought their way to truth and God. A few great books have done for the leaders of the Christian Church what no other agency, save possibly a few men like themselves, have been permitted to do. Undoubtedly, he turned also to the Word of God. "The divine writings are the bases and substance of our gospel ministry," writes he years later. "We are required like the prophet to devour the Book which contains the law and the gospel." In all probability he met most loyally the requirement.

He was ever an eager and most serious reader. In the journal of his first trip to America in 1784, in the record of the first

day of the voyage, he says, "Saint Austin's Meditations were this day no small blessing to my soul." A few days later, after days and nights of trial amid storms that threatened to overwhelm them, after much sleeplessness and a fast unbroken for five days, he writes: "This morning I was hungry and breakfasted on water gruel. I now began to recover my strength and employ myself in reading the life of Francis Xavier. O for a soul like his!"

Had he the conception of the glory and divine commission of the Christian ministry that he later emphasized, he would never have entered it as he did. Coke the curate of South Petherton was by no means the Coke of America. God led him step by step, and at times—so the young preacher thought—quite slowly. Sure it is that the views he entertained of the conditions requisite for entrance into the ministry were not held by him when he sought ordination. "It is too commonly thought," writes he, "that when a young student has taken his degree, and shown some sign of a genius for learning, he is well prepared to enter into the service of the Church." In all probability such was his thought when he presented himself for examination for

deacon's orders at Oxford, June 10, 1770. Three days later he was made Master of Arts. Two years later, on the 23d of August, 1772, he was ordained to the priesthood. He took out the degree of Doctor of Civil Laws in June, 1775.

The passion for honesty, however, kept him from a merely perfunctory discharge of his duties. He had to be a minister of Christ in fact as well as name. His nature —his first birth, one might well say, not to mention the second—drove him steadily forward.

Under the providence of God, soon after his entrance upon his duties as a curate he met Thomas Maxfield, the first lay preacher of Methodism. Rather should it be said, Maxfield met him, for it was he who made the advances. The report of the fervor and eagerness to know the truth that was brought to the humble itinerant showed to him a glorious opportunity. He took it, and under the guidance of God rightly used it, so that little by little Thomas Coke was led out into a larger place. "One evening," writes one, "while proceeding to the appointed place, musing on the engrossing theme, his mind was greatly drawn out in prayer for the assurance of that pardoning

love for whose voice he so intently listened. That same night his prayer was answered." Thus at length he came to a conscious knowledge of sins forgiven and peace with God.

The steps that followed leading him to cast in his lot with the early Methodists were few and quite easily traceable. Books, if not the Book, first; then men—large in heart, if not large in brain, unmistakable servants of the living God—next; then, the world. These are the agents under God of leading many a man out into the glorious freedom of the saints and seers. These are the agents that led Thomas Coke over a long, long journey.

His intensity in the ministry after he had met Mr. Maxfield led to suspicion on the part of those to whom he ministered. The priest who would pay out of his own purse the cost of repairs on his church and never ask to be reimbursed might well bear watching! Suspicion gave way to persecution, and persecution in time to a cruel separation from the Church he loved.

"The early Methodist preachers," said Charles Wesley to him at one time, "do not fully consider all the blessings of their situation, one of the greatest of which is

that wall of contempt with which you are surrounded, which preserves you from a thousand temptations to which the clergy in general are exposed by keeping the world at a distance from you." Possibly so. Possibly the world is kept at a distance. Possibly one may be sheltered within "walls of contempt," but none the less the hostile forces of the world come very near and dangerously ready to scale the sheltering barriers. After the Book, the men; and after the men, the world. The world of sneer and scorn, of privation and persecution, the world that hated its Saviour, hated his servants and failed not to show it.

Such, however, were his English grit and Christian grace that he gloried in his tribulations. "If the Lord were not to manage our weakness, and to humble us by afflictions; if he did not strike our bodies with some habitual languor, to render the world insipid to us; if he did not prepare for us some losses in our substance; if he did not blast some of our most favorite projects; if he did not place us in such situations that the most trying and yet unavoidable duties should fill our happiest hours; if he were not to raise up against us oppositions by false brethren or by true brethren; in a

word, if he were not to fix betwixt us and our weakness some kind of a barrier, which might be strong enough to arrest and retain us, we should soon be deceived by our false peace and prosperity; we should soon be without a bridle for ourselves or our desires. The same weakness and self-love which makes us so sensible of trials and afflictions would make us still more sensible to and less prepared for the dangers of pleasure and prosperity." Surely the man who could so analyze situations that the ordinary man either shrinks from or meets with a coward's cry for quarter, the man who could so meet them and so calmly and clearly describe what he met—surely this man is of the apostolic order. As one reads his words of exalted confidence in the God who makes all things work out for good, he seems to have before him in some modern version Paul's great apology for his life.

Dr. Coke's persecutions led him to take further counsel before separating himself absolutely from his Church. He sought the advice of a neighboring minister—Mr. Hull, a dissenting clergyman. Yet even in his fancied breadth he showed his pathetic narrowness and bigotry. After correspondence had been carried on for some time he

proposed that they meet in the home of a farmer, a mutual friend. At that time he had such Anglican prejudices that he would not invite Mr. Hull to his home and dared not go to Mr. Hull's. "Had Mr. Hull been dying and needed the offices of devotion," he tells us, "he believed he should have declined the task." A little later, God led him to the home of an aged man whose name is given by none of Dr. Coke's biographers—a happy Methodist who believed much and who lived as if he believed it. Later he was brought into contact with Rev. Mr. Brown, who brought to his attention Wesley's Sermons and Journal and the "Checks to Antinomianism" of Fletcher of Madeley. Soon after this he met Mr. Wesley.

One morning, after preaching with characteristic fervor, he was met before he could leave his church with the message from his rector that his services were no longer desired, and that he was by such announcement dismissed. His enemies shouted in glee, the church bells were discordantly pealed, and Thomas Coke went out into the world untrammeled and unafraid.

The study of these days gives one abundant material to insert between the lines of many a paragraph written later in life for

the guidance of young preachers. Four discourses on the "Duties of the Gospel Ministry," printed in 1798, give to us Dr. Coke's conception of the work and worth of the minister. The very first sentence is suggestive: "The ministerial office is the most important to the human race of any which is exercised on earth." This he learned after much service; yet it may be he had the first intimation of it in the days when his temper was tried in the humble curacy of South Petherton.

In these discourses, based upon a portion of Paul's charge to Timothy (2 Tim. 4. 1-5), three or four essentials of the Christian ministry are suggested that in all probability Dr. Coke learned during these days of his early service. Much is made of the fact and place of prayer. "What success can our discourses produce," writes he, "if the habit and life and spirit of prayer draw not down upon them that grace, that unction, which alone renders them useful to them that hear." Much is made also of the value of a heart set on fire with love for God: "Perhaps you are diffident concerning your gifts: but is it not a great gift to possess an ardent desire for the salvation of souls? With a heart penetrated and in-

flamed by this desire, a minister will always succeed: it is a substitute for all other talents; what shall I say, it forms them in him." Much is made of the place in the conversion of the world of godly conduct: "The generality even of the unawakened part of the world live by example and imitation. It is true that neither the examples nor the labors of the holiest preachers can have the least influence in the regeneration or salvation of souls without the unction of the Holy Spirit. But the person, the works, the actions, of a devoted ambassador of Christ are all anointed and breathe forth the savor of his name."

Truly, 'tis no little thing to be a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ, Thomas Coke being the witness.

CHAPTER V

LABORS IN ENGLAND AND IRELAND

THE discovery of Thomas Coke by John Wesley was most timely. In 1776 Methodism in England had fifty-five circuits, one hundred and fifty-five itinerant preachers, forty thousand members—a good working force and a great opportunity, yet few leaders. George Whitefield, the prince of preachers of early Methodist days, had gone to his reward, having died in Newburyport, Massachusetts, September 30, 1770. Charles Wesley had retired from active itinerant service, a bit uncertain regarding the wisdom of his brother's attitude toward the Church of England and yet unable to suggest a better one. John Wesley was an old man, apprehensive at times that his end was near, perplexed by problems that seemed to be without a precedent, deserted by many of his friends and well-nigh betrayed by his wife. He had been "severely peppered and salted of late years," to use the very expressive term of the day, and was working under conditions, so it was

said at the time, that must have made him "wince like an eel dispossessed of his skin."

Most surely assistance was needed, assistance in the higher councils, in the leadership at the front. It was equally sure that such assistance was difficult to be found. It was sure that it could not be found in the ranks of the itinerants. At the Conference of 1776 one preacher was excluded for inefficiency and two for misbehavior. All of the preachers were subjected to the most rigorous examination. "It is objected," writes Wesley, "that some of our preachers are utterly unqualified for their work and that others do it negligently, as if they had nothing to do but preach once or twice a day." Some one was needed to answer conclusively the cruel charge of Rowland Hill—cruel yet suggestive of the popular talk of the day—that Mr. Wesley was followed by "a ragged legion of preaching barbers, cobblers, tinkers, scavengers, draymen, and chimney-sweepers." Indeed, some one was needed to inspire them with normal self-respect. The repeated attack of foes without led at last to fears within. At the Conference of 1777 Mr. Wesley asked the question, "Have you reason to believe from your own observation that the

Methodists are a fallen people? Is there a decay or an increase in the work of God where you have been? Are the societies more dead or more alive to God than they were some years ago?" The answer to the question was quite satisfactory: "The societies are not dead to God; they are as much alive as they have been for many years." The answer was all that could be asked for; still the fact that such an answer was necessitated is most suggestive. Said Mr. Wesley, "In most places the Methodists are still a poor despised people, laboring under reproach and many inconveniences." The "poor despised people" needed the assistance of men with self-respect and the conviction that no place on earth could offer greater inducements than those found in the itinerant ministry. Most surely Mr. Wesley and Methodism needed Dr. Coke at the time when under the providence of God he was found.

Thomas Coke realized this, but realized also that he might well sit down carefully to count the cost before casting in his lot with the Methodists. He was invited to the Conference of 1777, but did not join till a year later. He spent the time intervening in travel with Mr. Wesley, studying at close

range and in all probability being just as keenly studied. In was of no little importance that at the Conference of 1777, when he received his first impression of Methodism as a whole, John Fletcher of Madeley was present. Once more God brought two great men together—one working his way through to light and the other exulting in the high noon of sublime faith. "His appearance," says Benson, writing of Fletcher, "his exhortations, and his prayers broke most of our hearts and filled us with shame and self-abasement for our little improvement." Wesley, aided by Fletcher, could outweigh any number of "cobblers and tinkers."

Yet it ought to be said that it was these humbler men, maligned and misunderstood by the clergy of their day, whom Coke quite speedily came to champion. When once he joined the ranks of the despised itinerants he gave them his love and loyalty. It was he who contended stoutly with Charles Wesley for an open pulpit at City Road, a pulpit where men unordained by the touch of men's hands but unmistakably called of God and set apart for service by the Head of the Church might preach the truth as God gave them to see it.

The humble itinerant, however, need not have been as humble as he was. Education according to the accepted standards was indeed denied him, yet many of these men were highly educated none the less. One of them, the son of most humble parents, at the age of seventeen began life as an itinerant preacher. His schooling must have been the simplest possible, yet he entered a ministry where he made it a rule to read a hundred pages daily and to preach at least once every day for forty-five years. He traveled between five and six thousand miles annually, most of this distance on horseback, yet found time somewhere in the wilds of the American forest or in the squalid hut of the frontiersman to learn to read Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He received the munificent salary of sixty-four dollars a year; therefore, could not have purchased many books, yet worked his way through to cultured fields of thought and taste. "Much of his life was spent on horseback," writes Tyerman, "in extemporized pulpits, or in log cabins crowded with talking men and noisy women, bawling children and barking dogs—cabins which he was obliged to make his offices and his studies and where with benumbed

fingers, frozen ink, impracticable pens, and rumpled paper he had to write his sermons, his journals, and his letters." True, this man was the best of his class—Francis Asbury, the saint and statesman of early American Methodism—yet he had associates of similar attainments and habits of life. There were men like him in old England as well. Possibly Thomas Walsh has yet to come to his own—Thomas Walsh, said by Mr. Wesley to be the best biblical scholar he ever knew. "Thomas Walsh (I will declare it on the housetop)," wrote Mr. Wesley in 1755, "has given me all the satisfaction I desire and all that an honest man could give. I love, admire, and honor him; and wish that we had six preachers in all England of his spirit." His education was found to a large degree outside the schools, for he entered active work at the age of nineteen; yet it was found, and the man who found it held it and cherished it as a scholar indeed. "I never asked him the meaning of a Hebrew word," says Wesley, "but he could tell me how often it occurred in the Bible and what it meant in each place." Thomas Walsh, however, died in 1759, and Francis Asbury was in America at the time when Mr.

Wesley summoned to his help the energetic enthusiast from Wales. The humble itinerant at times was a great man; but just at the time when John Wesley found Thomas Coke, the best examples of his class were either out of reach or summoned by God to higher service.

For a time after his union with the itinerants he aided Mr. Wesley in his correspondence. This was no slight task, for Mr. Wesley held firm and undelegated control over the most minute details of the work of his societies. Dr. Coke writes to the house steward of City Road, for example, sending his message at Mr. Wesley's suggestion, bidding him take great care of every shilling of the money received from the burial ground. He writes to another minute directions concerning the building of the chapel in Exeter: "Mr. Wesley is still of the opinion that the minutes of the Conference ought to be complied with, in having the seats in the middle with a rail running through the midst."

Such a man, however, could not long be kept at the work of a clerk or secretary. Very soon he sends word to Mr. Wesley that he is meeting the classes and is preaching on all possible occasions. "I had a

large congregation in the home of Mr. Ogden, Mr. Brooke's partner, in the evening," he says, "and about eighty this morning at five." In London he received from the Methodists a hearty welcome. So many came to hear him that he was forced to preach out in the fields under the open sky. He wore his gown and cassock, yet adapted himself in every other particular to his strange surroundings. It was a long stride forward for the man who would not cross the threshold of the home of a dissenting minister, there to talk of a glorious faith common to both, to go out into the fields to meet the jeers and scorn of a London mob. Yet gladly he went there to meet the most humble and uneducated of his hearers on a level. "He came home to the apprehension of the poor," writes one, "by homely familiar phrases; and to fastidious ears, it may be, in a vocabulary a degree too vulgar."

This eager descent to a level possibly a bit below that called for by the necessity of the case seems inconceivable to those who have only his printed sermons to guide them in their estimate of his style and diction. Later in life he published some of his sermons. From them we learn that he

thought clearly, with great dignity, and in most logical order. The "homely familiar phrases" of early days, to say nothing of the vocabulary that might offend fastidious taste, are not seen. If the estimate of his early work is a correct one, it simply emphasizes the determination of the speaker to be all things to all men, that by all means he might save some. Having broken with the larger requirements of Church and school, having set at naught the teachings and traditions of more decorous though decadent days, he could well be reckless with matters of petty concern.

His style, however, under ordinary circumstances can be judged from the sermons that we have left us. In a sermon, for example, on the text, "Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry," he has six points, each boldly numbered and each clearly italicized. We must watch, he says, against the desire of worldly things; against the light and trifling spirit of the world; against indolence; against the betraying of the truth; against a neglect and distaste of study; against the least alienation of our minds from God. Each word of warning is accompanied by a statement

of the reasons why it is given, and no thought is left until it seems clearly proven. His thoughts came warmed with emotion. All through his sermons there is spontaneous, unpremeditated prayer—even in the printed sermon, where one might well expect to find calm thought free from personalities of this nature. "O God," he cries in the midst of many an argument, "it is thou alone who canst support us under all trials; we are weakness itself without thee." In almost every paragraph there is the frank and apparently unguarded disclosure of what he sees himself to be. "O how he has broken my stubborn will, and humbled my proud heart, and moderated my ambitious views by afflictions." Everywhere there is an appeal for a holy abandon. "We read in the histories of the martyrs," he says, "how weak girls could set at defiance all the barbarity of tyrants! how children, before they were able to support the labors of life, could run with joy to meet the rigors of the most dreadful deaths! how old men sinking already under the weight of their bodies, seemed by their cries of triumph to feel their youth renewed as that of an eagle, in the midst of the torment of slow martyrdoms! And are you weak, my brethren?"

Clearness of thought, the glow of unfeigned emotion, the charm of the literary taste that analyzes every truth it touches and that presents in well-balanced phrases its varied conclusions, earnestness whatever the subject, expectancy of immediate result in holy resolution, loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ —these are found in his preaching even as it comes to us from the printed page yellow and dusty through long neglect. Well may the portrait that greets us in the opening pages of his biography present him in the attitude of the preacher standing by the opened Book of God.

Such a man could not long remain a humble follower. Very speedily he was forced to the front. 'Tis not to his discredit that he was willing to go. He had his ambitions: he frankly admits this to be the case—but they were not unworthy and they were ever obedient to his sense of duty and his regard for his brethren. Reckless ambition would never have carried itself as did the ambition of Dr. Coke in the freedom of America or in the desolation of England after Mr. Wesley's death. He was forced to the front, and most worthily heeded the propulsion of the Spirit of God. In seven years—from 1777 to 1784—he had ex-

hausted all the accepted conventionalities as well as originally discovered novelties of Methodist leadership that might be found in three kingdoms.

One might well ask the question why Dr. Coke was not selected by Mr. Wesley as his successor. He was in the prime of life, forty-four years younger than his great leader, and well tested. Undoubtedly Mr. Wesley asked the same question. For years he had been seeking for some one to take up his burdens when age or disability or his death should necessitate a radical change in the control of the societies. In 1766 he sought to find "any one or any five men" to whom he might transfer his task; and from 1766 to the date of the Deed of Declaration in 1784 was ever on the lookout for a plan that might commend itself to the wisdom of all concerned.

Possibly one reason why Thomas Coke did not have this opportunity was the prior selection of John Fletcher, of Madeley. In 1773—five years before Thomas Coke met in Conference—Mr. Fletcher was approached with the suggestion that he assume leadership when the crisis came. Said Mr. Wesley, in a letter that may well be quoted because of its portrayal of the conditions of

leadership: "Who is sufficient for these things? Qualified to preside over the preachers and the people? He must be a man of faith and love, and one that has a single eye to the advancement of the kingdom of God. He must have a clear understanding; a knowledge of men and things, particularly of the Methodist doctrine and discipline; a ready utterance; diligence and activity; with a tolerable share of health. There must be added to these, favor with the people, with the Methodists in general. . . . He must likewise have some degree of learning. . . . But has God provided one so qualified? Who is he? Thou art the man! . . . Without conferring, therefore, with flesh and blood, come and strengthen the hands, comfort the heart, and share the labors of your affectionate friend and brother."

This invitation Mr. Fletcher could not accept. Indeed, he more than once firmly refused it, though conscious of the honor and personal esteem that prompted it. Three years after the first suggestion of the possibility he wrote to Mr. Wesley: "I could, if you wanted a traveling assistant, accompany you, as my little strength would admit, in some of your excursions; but your recom-

mending me to the societies as one who might succeed you (should the Lord call you hence before me) is a step to which I could by no means consent. It would make me take my horse and gallop away. Besides, such a step would, at this juncture, be, I think, peculiarly improper and would cast upon my vindication of your minutes such an odium as the Calvinists have endeavored to cast upon your 'Address.' It would make people suspect that what I have done for truth and conscience' sake I have done with a view of being what Mr. Toplady calls 'the Bishop of Moorfields.' "

Another reason undoubtedly was the attitude of many of the inner circle of advisers, whose opinions Mr. Wesley was forced to consider. In all probability the fear that Methodism would continue a society within the Church of England, and in no sense an independent body, if Mr. Wesley's ideas were carried out along the original lines by a successor chosen by him, had much to do with the advice given him. Says Bishop Tigert, stating the opinion of Dr. Whitehead, which he qualifiedly accepts: "The more ambitious Wesleyan leaders were not satisfied to be thus bound after Mr. Wesley's death." This unwillingness to be bound to

a committee of control—the first form the idea assumed, a group of three men—might well have caused any one man to hesitate to take up the burden, even though he were of the sanguine temperament of Thomas Coke.

The opportunity, however, was never directly granted him. By the time he came into close fellowship with Mr. Wesley the refusal of Mr. Fletcher and the opposition of the Wesleyan leaders had turned Mr. Wesley's thoughts in another direction. He no longer sought an individual. He was planning the creation of what was afterward known as the "Legal Hundred."

There were in 1784 three hundred and fifty-nine Methodist chapels in the United Kingdom. According to the deeds under which most of them were held, they were to be kept "in trust for the sole use of such persons as might be appointed at the yearly Conference of the people called Methodists, provided that the said persons preached no other doctrines than those contained in Wesley's Notes on the New Testament and in his four volumes of sermons."

But who constituted this "yearly Conference of the people called Methodists," and after Mr. Wesley's death who could deter-

mine as to its legality or loyalty? This was the all-important question. If not answered, and answered wisely and speedily, the life of the Methodist Connection would be in extreme peril. Dr. Coke was one of the first to see this danger. It was he who consulted a lawyer in 1782, at the unanimous request of the Conference, finding out from him, as Tyerman says, "that there was nothing to preserve the Methodists from being shivered into a thousand fragments after Mr. Wesley's death." When Mr. Wesley had the case clearly presented to him he agreed that such was the condition. "Without some authentic deed fixing the meaning of the term, the moment I died the Conference had been nothing," he writes. "Therefore any of the proprietors of the land on which our preaching houses were built might have seized them for their own use, and there would have been none to hinder them, for the Conference would have been nobody, a mere empty name."

When Dr. Coke reported this opinion to the Conference in 1783, he was appointed to draw up some plan whereby the difficulty could be met. With the aid of two lawyers, Mr. Maddox and Mr. Clulow, he drew up the famous Deed of Declaration. This deed

was then submitted to Mr. Wesley, who approved it with one important alteration. Dr. Coke believed that all the preachers in full connection should be included in the legal Conference. Mr. Wesley believed that a much smaller number would be better. At first he desired no more than ten or twelve. He finally consented to name one hundred, leaving ninety-two of the preachers out of the chosen list. "Some of the oldest and ablest preachers in the Connection were excluded," writes John Hampson, Jr., one of the men shut out. "Many of the selected members were not only deficient in abilities, but some of them, at the time of their insertion in the deed, were only upon trial; while the chief qualifications of others were ignorance, fanaticism, and ductility."

The inevitable result followed. Thirty of the ninety men not chosen left the Connection, and Methodism staggered under the blow given her by the drastic hand of her leader. Whether the plan was the best or not no man can say. Dr. Coke, however, would have had it otherwise. He who might have planned for absolute authority for himself, according to the precedent set by John Wesley, who might have succeeded in accomplishing his object had such plan been

adopted, or at least in securing greater personal recognition than came to him for years, with rare wisdom planned and pleaded for a Methodism of the broadest democracy. It was not for some years after Mr. Wesley's death that Dr. Coke was elected to the presidency of the Conference. Indeed, the men most closely in touch with Mr. Wesley were passed by at first—Mr. Mather, for example, whom Wesley fully trusted, whom he had once ordained to act as superintendent in England. Dr. Coke, however, was elected secretary at the first Conference. This position he held for many years. He was ready to serve or ready to lead. If leadership could be granted him by the choice of his brethren, well and good; if not, leadership might come from other sources. He was not limited to conventional methods or recognized sources of power. He could lead and could select for himself, if necessary, his plan of campaign. He was ready to show enthusiastic obedience or equally enthusiastic originality. He needed the election of no body of associates to make him great.

His work in England was followed speedily by more pronounced service in Ireland. In 1782 Mr. Wesley sent him

across the channel to take charge of the Irish societies. He was commissioned to give to the Irish ministry all the independence of English guidance that seemed to him to be possible, and to guide them in their deliberations as their first president. This he did, and did so well that he held the position of leadership in Ireland, frequently serving as president, for thirty years, his last Conference being in the year 1813. In 1805 the Irish preachers requested his reappointment as president for the next year with these words: "Our love and respect for him increase every year, so that we were ready to look upon ourselves as orphans when ntrary winds delayed his coming so long." Under his leadership Methodism in Ireland steadily grew. In 1782 there were fifteen circuits, thirty-four preachers, and six thousand members. In 1813 there were fifty-six circuits, one hundred and twenty-one preachers, and twenty-eight thousand members. Indeed, so surely and steadily did Methodism in Ireland advance under his leadership that he might well be remembered primarily for the work done there. Surely he would thus be remembered if we were to judge by the quantity of labor ex-

pended or results realized, rather than by the quality of his work in original fields of activity at most important periods in the life of our Church. Ireland is remembered; but before we get fairly settled in our opinion as to its supreme worth we think of America. America is fairly remembered, but even America gives way to the lands of darkest heathenism whose cry for help he alone seemed to hear. Still, one must read the story of his labors in Ireland if he would see how the servant of God whom we would honor used his energies and talents for the spread of Christ's kingdom.

One might well ask at this time a question or two regarding what we call the home life of these leaders. As is well known, Mr. Wesley was most unhappily married. Tyerman says of Mrs. Wesley, "She was originally a not too respectable servant girl; a faithless woman who emphasized her perfidy and meanness in injuring the man whom at the altar of God she had sworn to love, honor, and obey." Francis Asbury remained a bachelor to the end of his days. He did not think it possible, so he said, to find a woman who had grace enough to live but one week in fifty-two with her husband, so he did not seek to

find one nor venture ahead into matrimony as if he had found. Charles Wesley had a happy home, having a loving wife and children. Dr. Coke for fifty-eight years remained single, then within a few years married twice. Romance, however—or romance as we use the term when we think of the love affairs of the great as well as the humble—had little to do with his selection of a helpmeet. His work, God's work, was ever uppermost in his thought. One day in Bristol he made an appeal for missions and received a subscription from a wealthy maiden lady of the sum of one hundred guineas. When he called to collect the sum promised she made the gift two hundred. Such generosity overwhelmed him. It was too much like his own. He married her only a few weeks later. Six years after this she died, a woman most highly respected, famous for her good deeds and hearty support of her husband. Dr. Coke within a short period married a second time. This marriage also was of short duration, for his wife died within a year.

Home, in the true sense of the word, few of these men knew. Not only they had "no cottage in the wilderness," as they were wont to say in song, but no resting place

in the cottage of anyone else. They were ever on the move. It could be said of John Wesley, Thomas Coke, and countless others —of Francis Asbury especially—that not only was the world their parish, but the world was their home. After seventeen years of service in the Methodist ministry Dr. Coke wrote to an old school fellow, saying that he had not known during all this time what it was to have an hour to spare, or to have a day long enough in which to accomplish all that he thought should be done. Men like this know little of home life.

'Tis such a man whom John Wesley in 1784 determined to send to meet the hardships of America.

CHAPTER VI

ON THE ATLANTIC

"I ESTEEM my little chamber a peculiar gift of God," writes Dr. Coke in his Journal of one of his trips across the Atlantic. "It is taken out of the steerage, and is so far, on the one hand, from the common sailors, and, on the other, from the cabin passengers, that all is still and quiet, and here I can be with God. Blessed be his name, he does make it my sanctum sanctorum, filling it, my soul at least, with light and glory."

In such a place, where "the soul at least" was supremely content—the suggestion of an exception fully explained by a frank record here and there of seasickness—Thomas Coke spent many a long day.

Eighteen times he crossed the Atlantic, nine times out from home and nine times back again; eighteen times in the day when an ocean voyage consumed seven or eight times as long as one does now, and when discomforts and dangers were either hourly met or hourly anticipated. "We have a

Jonah on board, that's plain enough," growled a sailor once at the height of a storm, making his way to the cabin of Dr. Coke and rudely forcing an entrance into the preacher's sanctum sanctorum; "we have a Jonah on board." And as he said it he seized books and papers and threw them overboard. The itinerant bishop barely escaped going overboard after them. "The various means they employed," writes he of the captain and crew with whom once he sailed, "the means employed to make my voyage painful, are not easily to be described. Common delicacy, indeed, would prevent me from relating their conduct. . . . The cruel usage I received brought on a fit of illness which confined me to my bed three days. O how I was weaned from the world and all its follies!"

Discomfort was paralleled by positive danger. Fierce storms on the wild Atlantic seemed to await his coming. "At ten at night," writes he in the Journal of his second voyage, "I heard the captain's wife crying out in the most dreadful fright; and presently one of the passengers came running, exclaiming, 'Pray for us, Doctor: for we are just gone!' I came out and found that the ship was on her beam ends. They

were just going to cut away the mainmast." Dr. Coke adds the statement that one of his party led in prayer, and then says, "It was not till after this, and we had sung a hymn together, that the foresail was shivered, and by that means the masts were saved, and probably the ship itself."

To the dangers of the deep were added the terrors of war. On his seventh voyage his ship was captured by a French privateer and taken as a prize to the West Indies. Dr. Coke was permitted to make his way back to the United States as best he could, stripped of all his personal property except the books and papers which were to him ever priceless.

Notwithstanding all this—discomfort, danger, insult, and positive abuse—he hailed the opportunity to cross the sea whenever it was offered him. On the broad Atlantic, in the little room that he called the "peculiar gift of God," he had the privilege granted him and given to him nowhere else, to read, to study, and to write; and Thomas Coke, though an itinerant of itinerants, was ever a scholar. Methodism might well be jealous of the term "Oxford Movement": it was hers by right of possession, if not divine appointment, long before the days of

Newman and Pusey. In the cabin of these humble little vessels that carried a few of the coals of Methodist fire from old England to young America was the best that Oxford could give for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. "My books, my papers, and above all my fellowship with God," writes Dr. Coke, "have made the whole way agreeable."

Yet it was not for the delight of literature alone that he turned to his books. Everything was subservient to the one purpose. He never forgot his call and his commission. Even his study and his hours of comparative ease were haunted—if such a term is not too sinister—by the vision of the duty just ahead of him, and were adapted to meet it when it came. He studied much, yet studied that he might give his conclusions to the next group of eager itinerants he might meet. He wrote and read, yet wrote and read for the rank and file of his societies who did neither, or for the humble preachers who might be prevailed upon to read such books as their leaders selected for them. Among other tasks assigned him by the Conference was the writing of a Commentary on the Bible. The assignment he obediently and loyally accepted and

hurried to fulfill in the little cabin of a tossing vessel on the wild waste of the broad Atlantic. 'Tis safe to say that Methodism did more serious study through the scholarly toil of its early missionaries on the surface of the sea than many a Church in calmer days has done in the classic shadows of the great libraries.

Yet he needed no classic shadows to give him inspiration. "I find a ship a most convenient place for study," writes he, "though it is sometimes a great exercise for my feet, legs, and arms to keep myself steady to write. From the time I rise till bedtime, except during meals, I have the cabin table to myself and work at it incessantly."

When his study was not for some specific and immediate purpose he turned instinctively to books of devotion and to the classics. Of his first voyage he writes: "September 18th.—Saint Austin's Meditations were made this day no small blessing to my soul. Saturday, October 2nd.—Reading Virgil. I can say in a much better sense than he,

> Deus nobis hæc otia fecit,
> Namque erit ille mihi semper Deus.

Monday, 4th.—Finished the life of David Brainerd. The most surprising circum-

stance in the whole, I think, is that the great work which by the blessing of God he wrought among the Indians was all done through the medium of an interpreter. Tuesday, 5th.—I have just finished 'The Confessional,' and believe the author does not speak without reason in his observations concerning national Churches, that the kingdom of Christ is not of this world; that in proportion to the degrees of union which subsist between the Church and State, religion is liable to be secularized, and made the tool of sinister and ambitious men. Monday, 18th.—I have waded through Bishop Hoadley's Treatises on Conformity and Episcopacy—566 pages. He is a powerful reasoner, but is, I believe, wrong in his premises. Thursday.—I finished the Pastorals of Virgil, which, notwithstanding their many exceptionable passages, by a kind of magic power conveyed me to fields and groves and purling brooks, and painted before my eyes all the beauties of Arcadia, and would have almost persuaded me that it is possible to be happy without God. However, they served now and then to unbend the mind."

To do all this work one might well need to be "sea proof," as Dr. Coke said that at

last he found himself to be. "Sometimes for a little variety," he writes in the journal of a later voyage, "I read Virgil, and every day a canto of Spenser, the English Virgil. I am astonished the writings of Spenser are not more read. His genius and imagination were amazing, and from his allegories may be extracted some of the most instructive lessons of religion. I grudge not the twenty shillings I gave for his works. With such company I think I could live comfortably in a tub."

What a comment on the scholarship and unwavering zeal of these men of one idea, men who had determined in some solemn moment of blessed experience to know only Jesus Christ and him crucified, these pages from this old Journal everywhere give to us! To "unbend" their minds, they read the Pastorals of Virgil; to get ready for the strange tribes of unknown red men whom they may possibly meet they read the lives of such heroes as David Brainerd; when they—or those whom Dr. Coke represents—desire a quotable sentence in which to express their sense of divine guidance and their undying loyalty to God, they find it and give it in the Latin, which some of their more boastful followers can barely

translate. What a contrast to the list that many an itinerant of to-day would make is this catalogue of works of serious thought in stately prose and poetry!

Possibly the poetry of Virgil was read because the reader had the soul of a poet. One seeks in vain to find any original verse written by Dr. Coke, but does not seek in vain to find that he might have written had he cared to introduce his thoughts to rhyme and rhythm. At least he had the heart and soul of a poet if not the mental agility; the mind of a poet if not the melody. "I went on deck about half an hour before sunrise," he writes, "and saw the most glorious sight I ever beheld except once on my former voyage. The eastern sky was covered with a most beautiful canopy of purple, all over decorated with spangles of gold. The heavens did indeed declare the glory of God." Once when approaching the shores of Ireland he writes: "No pencil can express their beauty. . . . Sloping hills, perpendicular rocks, turrets seated on eminences, and here and there an opening glade or lawn; sometimes even a town or village. They who are not acquainted with the seas have no conception of the pleasure it gave, especially as my mind was enabled to ascend

to the celestial Painter whose glorious work was so visibly before me. 'But they were mere clouds,' says the phlegmatic scorner. And what is the work of a Raphael but canvas and paint?" He is an artist and a poet in intention or in his aspirations if not in deed and attainment. But even the artist is at the best but a good second to the preacher. After his exultant note of appreciation of what he sees in the clouds above the Irish coast he cries out, "All is cloud and vapor without the enjoyment of God." With some such sentence does he end every bit of description. "We had this evening a most beautiful sunset," writes he in the journal of his fifth voyage. "A great cloud, like a mountain of flaming fire, stood apparently above and upon the sun. Just above this cloudy mountain of fire was a smaller one equally splendid, exactly in the shape of a crown; and the horizon to the right and left seemed all on fire. . . . We can view God in all things."

Surely John Wesley chose wisely. Methodism in the new country whither Mr. Wesley was sending it needed the infusion of the gracious gentility that Dr. Coke gave it. Fiery fervor was not lacking. Evangelistic zeal went singing and shouting its

happy message up and down the Atlantic coast. Asbury, grim and great, stern toward himself and therefore stern toward his preachers, was setting an example that few men were rugged enough to follow. "Will other bishops ride from five to six thousand miles in nine months for eighty dollars a year?" asks Francis Asbury in a defense of his rights as a bishop and in an inevitable contrast between his activity and the inactivity of bishops of other Churches. "Will they make arrangements for seven hundred preachers and ordain one hundred men annually, ride through all kinds of weather and roads at our time of life, the one fifty-six and the other sixty-nine years of age?" With such a leader, that fanaticism or asceticism on the part of lesser men might not result, there must go such a man as Thomas Coke. With him there was no less fervor; but there were more fields than one known to him from which to gather material for his sacred fire. That Methodism might be the religion of all classes, that it might keep those whom it found after prosperity had come to them, such a leader as Dr. Coke was needed.

And Dr. Coke needed Methodism. He was too vigorous and generous a man to

have remained content without large work, and work that could ever command his extreme energy. Southey says of him, "His Welsh blood was soon up." His temper was quick and hot and his emotions deep and abiding. Said he at one time to a man who offered him five hundred pounds a year to stay in Antigua, where he was having most remarkable success, "God be praised, five hundred thousand a year would be to me a feather, when opposed to my usefulness in the Church of Christ." If Thomas Coke was the gift of God to American Methodism, Methodism was the gift of God to him. Indeed, he and others like him belong to that strange class of men who perplex us ever in our distinction between cause and result. Whether Thomas Coke was the cause, under God, of the great work that was carried along with him wherever he went, or whether he was the result of that work—made great through it—no man can say. In all probability he was both cause and result. As he said of the sunset scene off the shores of England, so we can say, "We can see God in all things."

CHAPTER VII

LABORS IN AMERICA

In 1784, when Thomas Coke, bearing high credentials from John Wesley, first came to America, he met a most peculiar condition of things in the Church of his youth and early ministry. In the new Republic there was of necessity no longer any vestige of the Church of England. "The English government has no authority either civil or ecclesiastical," writes Mr. Wesley in a famous letter to "Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and the Brethren in North America," "any more than over the States of Holland. A civil authority is exercised over them partly by Congress, partly by the Provincial Assemblies. But no one either exercises or claims any ecclesiastical authority at all." With the hauling down of the English flag and the sailing away of the English armies, with the surrender of all claim to control in affairs of state on the part of the mother country, the Church of England in America absolutely ceased to be.

Not that there were no churches in

America—no churches of the Anglican Episcopal form of faith and conduct. There were such churches, though there were not many. In Virginia, for example, where the Church had been relatively strong, there were only twenty-eight clergymen—twenty-eight instead of ninety-one, the number holding positions at the outbreak of the war. These twenty-eight men had the supervision of what remained of the work and worship carried on a little while before in one hundred and sixty-four churches and chapels. Ninety-five parishes had been forsaken; thirty-four were existent only in name, never being visited by a clergyman. Elsewhere it was no better. In the middle and Eastern Colonies even before the war there were only eighty Episcopal ministers.

All this, however, could have been endured and at last overcome had there been any leadership or central authority. Indeed, the ability of the clergymen who stepped to the front and organized the Protestant Episcopal Church should receive our respect if not admiration. In America there was no bishop, and for sixty years had been none. The spirit of colonial America was against all such authority. Puritanism, with its

large principles and petty prejudices, its memories and its suspicions, withstood bitterly every priest, large or little, from Rome or from England. "What a wonderful change," writes Bishop White in 1836, "has the author lived to witness in reference to American Episcopacy! He remembers the ante-revolutionary times when the presses profusely emitted pamphlets and newspaper disquisitions on the question whether an American bishop were to be endured; and when threats were thrown out of throwing such a person, if sent among us, into the river." This sentiment and threatened opposition in America was appreciated to the limit in England and implicitly obeyed. Affairs in America were largely controlled by the diocese of London. Apparently England was as loath to give the semblance of independence to the Church in the Colonies as it was to give independence to the state.

Popularity also was lacking—popularity as well as positive power. The common people distrusted the Church of England—feared it as if it were the center of treacherous priestcraft and tyranny. The government of colonial days also feared it. In 1722, when there were two bishops in America—Dr. Welton and Dr. Talbot—one

in Philadelphia and the other in Burlington, New Jersey, the government of the two colonies forbade all exercise of episcopal authority. Even under the new government people felt largely the same. They could not forget that during the dark days of the Revolution the clergy of the Church of England stood for the king or fled across the seas to seek his protection; not all of them, 'tis true, but the large proportion of them. So was it, let us say in all fairness, with the itinerants sent over by Mr. Wesley from England. Mr. Asbury alone stood for the cause of the Colonies. The ordination vows of the clergy made them loyal to the throne as well as to the Church, and, it may be, their sense of dependence on the support granted them by the mother country.

For not only did the Church lose power and popularity during the days of our Revolution, but property as well. In Virginia, for example, all the landed endowments of the Church of England were lost. In the Middle and Eastern States the clergy were refused all support from home after the recognition of the independence of the Colonies.

It was a Church that was poor, therefore, as well as unpopular and powerless, that

Mr. Wesley had to think of when he considered the relation of his distant societies to the Church he loved.

But this was not all. Two agencies were at work, one on the part of the Church and one on the part of the societies. The Church seemed to be moving toward a Presbyterian form of government. In 1782 Dr. White issued a pamphlet entitled "The Case of the Episcopal Churches in the United States Considered." In this pamphlet he advocated the formation of a new organization without bishops, a step seriously considered but afterward found unnecessary. Such a plan, even as a possibility, even as a last resort, was most suggestive of the general unrest and radical spirit of the day. Something of this Mr. Wesley must have known, for the pamphlet was published two years before Dr. Coke set sail for America, and in the day when Mr. Wesley was seeking from all sources information regarding affairs in the Colonies.

In the societies independence was almost achieved. At the Conference, now recognized as the "regular" Conference, held in 1779—the Fluvanna Conference in Virginia —by formal vote four of the preachers were

authorized to administer the sacraments. Formal ordination, such as the Church of their fathers had insisted upon, these men brushed aside as unnecessary. A committee was created and constituted as a "presbytery." Its members were empowered, "first, to administer the ordinances themselves; second, to authorize any other preacher or preachers, approved by them, by the laying on of hands." The committee accepted these powers and privileges of leadership, and quite rightfully. Asbury years before had been superseded by Thomas Rankin. Indeed, Asbury had been formally recalled by Wesley, though providentially the letter of recall did not reach him in time to be of effect. Rankin, after he had held the position of high responsibility for a little time, at the outbreak of the war fled to England, whence he never returned.

For years American Methodism had no official leadership—or none that formal vote or appointment according to established and unassailable authority had created. "We have seen," writes Bishop Tigert, "how Mr. Asbury was first recognized as general assistant by the irregular Delaware Conference of 1779, after the

retirement of Mr. Rankin and the other English preachers and after William Watters had presided at the Conference of 1778. After the reunion of the Northern and Southern Conferences he was again unanimously chosen in 1782 to 'preside over the American Conferences and the whole work,' it being added, however, that this was 'according to Mr. Wesley's original appointment. . . . During the Revolutionary War Mr. Wesley's control of the Americans had been cut off, and thus Asbury's leadership had become thoroughly established on the basis of the unanimous consent of the preachers." This commission, therefore, or the Conference that created it, had sufficient precedent for its action.

Independence, therefore, was in the blood. "I may want all the influence in America which you can throw into my scale," writes Dr. Coke to John Wesley, August 9, 1784. "Mr. Brackenbury informed me at Leeds that he saw a letter from Mr. Asbury in which he said that he would not receive any person deputed by you with any part of the superintendency of the work invested in him; or words which evidently implied so much." Independence was so clearly recognized that Mr. Asbury, in the report of his

first interview with Dr. Coke, speaks of the "Independent Episcopal Church."

"The preachers north of Virginia," however, to quote the words of Jesse Lee, "were opposed to the step so hastily taken by the brethren in the South. . . . There was great cause to fear a division, and both parties trembled for the ark of God. . . . There was little room to hope that they would ever recede from their new plan, in which they were so well established. But, after all, they consented, for the sake of peace and the union of the body of Methodists, to drop the ordinances for a season, till Mr. Wesley could be consulted."

Everything, therefore, led Mr. Wesley and Dr. Coke to the conclusion they reached regarding the status of the scattered societies in America. They were confronted by conditions that were unique; they were dealing with men who had tasted the delights of freedom and who were simply waiting through courtesy rather than loyalty advices from the old home; they were unable to offer to their societies, with any certainty, a Church to which they might go; the next report from across the sea might reveal to them that Presbyterianism had taken the place of Episcopacy. Further,

they were assured of their remarkable growth even under such adverse conditions, and equally well assured that no action of their own could retard continued growth; they may have recognized that little action on their part was needed to further it. The societies were like lusty sons far from home, fully able to take care of themselves, waiting to hear what their parents might suggest, yet fully persuaded that they could get along without their help if they thoughtlessly sought to thwart what seemed to them their destiny. "I have accordingly appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint superintendents over our brethren in North America," writes Mr. Wesley. He then adds the very suggestive sentence, "If any one will point out a more rational and scriptural way of feeding and guiding the poor sheep in the wilderness, I will gladly embrace it."

Very likely he meant exactly what he said. Very likely Mr. Wesley would have most gladly seen his way clear to take some other step than the one which he took. He was never eager to break with established customs. He never forced his way out of the Church, and rarely took without great deliberation the suggestion of an open door

and a beckoning opportunity. He dragged unwilling steps toward anything that seemed to him irregular or novel. He was a conservative doing the work of a radical. He never took a step forward until he had proven to himself by the most convincing argument that he had no right to remain where he was.

Thomas Coke, on the other hand, was of a different temper. He would leap and hunt for reasons afterward to justify the leap. In the great affairs of life his judgment took counsel with caution, but in the large spaces where common principles ruled he roamed readily at will. Had there been, then, no Revolution in America, no severance of the Church of England with Episcopacy in the North American Colonies, no Fluvanna Conference with its intimations of what might be done and its successful experiment of independency though only for a brief season, the Methodist Episcopal Church would never have been established. More than this, had a man of less daring and less readiness to sympathize with new and unprecedented situations than Thomas Coke been sent the story of the famous Christmas Conference in 1784 would be radically unlike what it is. "Coke's con-

duct at this juncture and after his arrival in America," writes Bishop Tigert, "when Mr. Dickins advised him to carry out his mission on Mr. Wesley's authority without consulting Mr. Asbury, must win our admiration for its obvious delicacy and nice sense of propriety."

It was of the providence of God that Thomas Rankin was recalled from his position as general assistant, that Mr. Wesley himself was too old to come, that Thomas Coke was the man selected, and that Francis Asbury took the stand he did.

From two sources Dr. Coke received his power: Mr. Wesley and the Methodist itinerants in Baltimore.

In February, 1784, a year ever to be remembered in Methodism, Mr. Wesley first consulted with Dr. Coke concerning the critical step about to be taken. "He stated to him," so writes Mr. Drew, who knew Thomas Coke well, "that he had much admired the mode of ordaining bishops which the Church of Alexandria had practiced" (an ordination by the presbyters of one of their own body on the decease of a bishop), "and that, being a presbyter himself, he wished Dr. Coke to accept such ordination at his hands, and to proceed in that char-

acter to the continent of America to superintend the societies of the United States."

Dr. Coke hesitated—for the step was a most radical one, radical even for him—and asked for time that he might consider what should be done. After two months' study he came to the conclusion that Mr. Wesley's position was a wise one, and heartily yielded to his request. In September he accepted ordination at the hands of Mr. Wesley, assisted by Mr. Creighton, a presbyter in charge of the City Road Chapel. At the same time Whatcoat and Vasey, two of the preachers, were ordained, first as deacons, then as elders, and commissioned to go with Dr. Coke to America.

From Mr. Wesley, then, Dr. Coke received his ordination; but from his brethren in America he received the power that made that ordination of value. The intinerants in America, with the memory of their experiment in Fluvanna and the knowledge that there were leaders among them large in thought and faith, could have gotten along without the formality of the ordination at the hands of Mr. Wesley; so could Dr. Coke, and so in all probability he would have done had he come in contact with the new life of American independence sooner

than he did. The Wesleyan ordination was important; but the Christmas Conference election far more important, and the wisdom with which Dr. Coke received it.

It is possibly of interest—Dr. Stevens seems to think it to be so—that the first minister to meet Dr. Coke on his arrival in America was John Dickins, preacher in charge in New York city. To him Dr. Coke outlined the plan he had brought with him. "Dickins, being one of the Fluvanna brethren," so says Dr. Stevens, "emphatically approved it. . . . Coke deemed it expedient to disclose it no further till he could consult Asbury."

Asbury at first was astounded at the proposition. Said he: "I was shocked when first informed of the intention of these my brethren in coming to this country. It may be of God. My answer then was, if the preachers unanimously choose me; I shall not act in the capacity I have hitherto done by Mr. Wesley's appointment."

At the "Christmas Conference," in Lovely Lane Chapel in Baltimore, this condition exacted by Mr. Asbury was cordially met. He was unanimously elected superintendent, and accepted the position granted him because of that election—not because of Mr.

Wesley's appointment. The men with whom he served, his associate itinerants, were to him the source of power—not the great leader across the Atlantic.

Dr. Coke was also unanimously elected superintendent, and Dr. Coke also accepted such election. Whether he saw the far-reaching importance of his action in accepting at the hands of his brethren credentials to the position which he afterward so successfully filled; whether he saw what might have resulted had he rested on his possible rights to go ahead under the appointment which he already had received from Mr. Wesley and which Mr. Wesley apparently thought final, we do not know. Indeed, 'tis doubtful if anyone at that time saw the radical nature of the step they had taken. A group of societies arbitrarily ruled as few men dare or care to rule their own households, and a Church with conditions of membership created by the members themselves or by their representatives, are not one and the same; and at this remove men readily so admit. At the Christmas Conference, however, and for a few years afterward the severance between the two was not detected. At the Christmas Conference it was declared: "During the life of Mr.

Wesley, we acknowledge ourselves his sons in the gospel, ready in matters belonging to church government to obey his commands. And we do engage, after his death, to do everything that we judge consistent with the cause of religion in America and the political interests of these States, to preserve and promote our union with the Methodists in Europe." This filial arrangement lasted for three years—no longer. Indeed, there seems to have been a reaction, for Mr. Wesley's request to have Mr. Whatcoat "appointed" superintendent with Mr. Asbury in 1787 was refused. It was not till 1800—thirteen years later—that the request was granted; and then not because Mr. Wesley requested it, but because Whatcoat deserved it. Still, the chances are that Dr. Coke did see the serious importance of his action. Many a possibility must have been foreseen by Mr. Wesley and himself as they worked their way through to a radical conclusion; many a possibility as Dr. Coke read the exhaustive arguments of Bishop Hoadley while crossing the Atlantic; many a possibility as Francis Asbury stepped forward with his blunt and peremptory condition.

Surely Mr. Wesley saw quite speedily

what it all meant. Said he to Mr. Whatcoat: "It was not well judged of Brother Asbury to suffer, much less indirectly encourage, the foolish step in the last Conference. Every preacher present ought, both in duty and in prudence, to have said, 'Brother Asbury, Mr. Wesley is your father, consequently ours.' Candor will affirm this in the face of the world. It is highly probable that disallowing *me* will, as soon as my head is laid, occasion a total breach between the English and American Methodists. They will naturally say, 'If they can do without us, we can do without them.'"

Providential, then, was Dr. Coke's acquiescence. Had he stood out for Mr. Wesley's absolute authority, for his proprietorship over the new Church—though no longer a group of "societies"—for his right to appoint as superintendent whomsoever he might name, Methodism would have been seriously crippled at her birth. As it was, he showed that he possessed the characteristics which he told Mr. Wesley the man sent to America should possess—"influence, prudence, and delicacy of conduct."

CHAPTER VIII

A BISHOP INDEED

"I PREACHED the funeral sermon for Dr. Coke," writes Bishop Asbury in his journal for May 21, 1815, "a gentleman, a scholar, and to us a bishop."

So the Methodist Church has always considered him—a bishop indeed, ever abundant in labor and alert in independent and sagacious leadership.

He gladly went where his preachers had to go. He met without murmur their hardships, experienced their privations and persecutions, lived their simple life. "All the property I have gained is two old horses," writes Asbury to Coke as the latter was about to sail for the West Indies in 1792, "the constant companions of my toil six or seven thousand miles every year. When we have no ferryboats they swim the rivers. As to clothing, I am nearly the same as at first; neither have I silver nor gold, nor any other property." So Thomas Coke would gladly have said, if wealth had not been forced upon him; as it was, he did his best

to spurn intimate acquaintance with prosperity. "Our journeys in the back parts of Carolina and Georgia," writes he, "were very trying. Sometimes we lost our way; in one instance twenty-one miles. In general nothing but bacon and eggs, with Indian corn. Mr. Asbury had brought with him some tea and sugar. In several places we had to lie on the floor; which indeed I regarded not, though my bones were a little sore in the mornings." Time and time again he lost his way through the trackless forests; once at least he was nearly drowned at a treacherous ford. He met the summer's heat and the winter's chill as the humble itinerant of the day met them, and thought it no hardship. His food was frequently the scantiest and the poorest. "Many times we ate nothing from seven in the morning till six in the evening," he tells us in the record of a trip that he made with Bishop Asbury, "though sometimes we took our repast on stumps of trees near some spring of water." He met genuine and most bitter opposition. "A high-headed lady," he tells us of one experience, "told the rioters that she would give fifty pounds if they would give that little Doctor one hundred lashes. When I came out, they

surrounded me but had only power to talk." Notwithstanding all this—ignorance of the country, the taste and training of the scholar of ease and refinement, the petty irritations of the misguided, malicious people to whom he sought to minister—he moved steadily forward preaching from place to place, at times to throngs of people. "On the Lord's Day," he tells us, "though there was no town within a great many miles of the spot, I think there were about four thousand hearers. We here ordained five deacons in public, and it was a very solemn and profitable time."

One year's record reads like all the others, simply necessitating a change of names and dates. He was always on the move and always preaching. During his fourth visit to America, for example, he sought to find out from personal observation the status of the Church wherever it was established. Methodism stretched over an area of two thousand miles. There were seven Annual Conferences, so called. It was Dr. Coke's desire to preside at each of these, if possible. He started on his tour of investigation at Charleston, where he held a South Carolina Conference. He next moved toward Georgia; thence to North

Carolina. "Every night before we concluded," writes he of the Conference there, "heaven itself seemed to be opened in our souls. One of the preachers was so blessed in the course of our prayers that he was constrained to cry, 'I was never so happy in my life before. O what a heaven of heavens do I feel!'" From North Carolina he went on to Virginia, where two Conferences were held. While in Port Royal he was told of the death of Mr. Wesley. He determined to hasten back to England, feeling that he was needed there, and possibly anticipating his selection as Mr. Wesley's successor. At Baltimore he preached a funeral sermon on the text, "And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." After a few days' delay through sickness he reached Newcastle, whence he sailed for London, having been away from England less than a year.

His hardships, however, seemed to have given him little concern. He ever saw something to rejoice over. "There is something exceedingly pleasing," he tells us, "in preaching daily to large congregations in immense forests. . . . It is one of my most delicate enjoyments to engulf my-

self, if I may so express it, in the woods. I seem then to be detached from everything but the quiet creation and my God." In Virginia he says: "All was delightful except the sight of a great cruel hawk which was devouring a little squirrel on a rock. The oaks have opened out their leaves; and the dogwood tree, whose bark is medicinal, and whose innumerable white flowers form one of the finest ornaments of the forest, was in full bloom. The deep green of the pines, the bright transparent green of the oaks, and the fine white of the flowers of the dogwood, with other trees and shrubs, form such a complication of beauties as are indescribable to those who have lived in countries entirely cultivated." As one reads these words he thinks of the greatest Teacher of all, who could see the sparrow fall, hear the ravens cry for their food, straighten the bruised reed, and find delight in the lilies of the field. Surely the hardships of the itinerancy did not crush from the soul of Thomas Coke that poetry and tenderness of sympathy that are charms even in the lives of the greatest.

Yet his labors were his least gift to the Church. His leadership and life were of far more worth.

And leadership he gave: not that leadership that others create and place in one's hands; not that representative leadership solely that is the boast of complacent brethren elevated for reasons no man can fathom to positions of trust and power; not that tardy leadership that reveals itself only when it finds no way whereby to avoid a forward step; not the leadership that is claimed when the battle is well-nigh won and the shrewd ear detects the first note of victory; not the leadership that accomplishes its purpose because its plans are conservative and always found well labeled upon the beaten path: but leadership that one's brain and heart and independent judgment show to be the need of the hour. He was a bishop indeed.

Three evidences of his mastery of the conditions of his day may be cited in this brief portrayal of his worth to the Church.

First, his recognition of the government of the new Republic. He placed Methodist patriotism second only to Methodist piety. On May 29, 1789, immediately after the inauguration of George Washington as President, a letter was presented to him signed by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury expressing the sincere congratulations

they felt "in behalf of the Methodist Episcopal Church" on his elevation to his high office. In this address they referred to the recent "glorious Revolution," to the "most excellent constitution of these States, which is at present the admiration of the world and may in future become its great exemplar for imitation." They promised their most "fervent prayers at the throne of grace" that God Almighty might endue the new President "with all the graces and gifts of his Holy Spirit"; they expressed to the President their fullest confidence in his wisdom and integrity, and said that they were moved to speak as they did because of the "warm feelings of the heart." The address was read by Francis Asbury, though it bears evidence in its ardor and literary style to be the work of Thomas Coke. His signature precedes that of Asbury. "The President," says Mr. Morrell, who secured the audience with General Washington and who was present throughout the interview, "read his reply with animation."

And well he might. A Church at last, though established only a few years before —a Church of the people with thousands of loyal soldiers in its membership, one of

them Major Morrell, now a representative minister—a Church as a Church deliberately though fervently pledges its support to the institutions and the land he loved and for which he had risked his life. It was no little thing to lead the Church to do with such dignity so gracious a deed, and Thomas Coke was large enough to see it. That he paid the price for this forward step when next he returned to England shows the estimation of its worth if not its wisdom on the part of his English associates. He was formally rebuked by his Wesleyan brethren in the old home, "and the judgment was unanimous," writes one who plainly holds the same opinion, an English biographer, "that as a subject of the English monarchy the Doctor had departed from propriety in signing the address; that it was apparent to himself, as well as to others, that he had been indiscreet." Whether he thought so or not amid the hostile surroundings of a sensitive and defeated people we do not know. We are fully persuaded that his act was the act of a leader, and that the Church holds an enviable position because of it.

Very speedily Dr. Coke took steps both in America and England toward what we call

Church unity. Each of these steps was unsuccessful, and one of them he himself afterward regretted; yet each was the forward step of a leader, and the Church need never to be ashamed of them. In America he sought for nothing less than a formal union between the two Episcopal bodies—the Methodist Episcopal and the Protestant Episcopal Churches. He entered into correspondence with Bishop White soon after the O'Kelly schism in Methodism, looking toward organic union. He stipulated that the status of Methodism should be recognized, that her ministerial orders should be considered valid, and that the Church should surrender none of its peculiar usages. "Our ordained ministers will not, ought not, to give up their right of administering the sacraments," writes he to Bishop White, April 24, 1791. It was his thought that both he and Bishop Asbury retain their powers as bishops. He had no scruple, however, to "submit to a reimposition of hands in order to accomplish a great object." Bishop White was kindly disposed toward the plan. His Church, however, overruled it. Bishop Coke never submitted the plan to his own Church. He went ahead alone along a venturesome way.

His work in England was of a similar character. In 1798 he wrote to the Bishop of London concerning what he called "the necessity of securing the great body of Methodists to the Church of England." "I am inclined to think," writes he, "that if a given number of our leading preachers, proposed by our General Conference, were to be ordained and permitted to travel through our Connection to administer the sacraments to those societies . . . every difficulty would be removed. I have no doubt that the people would be universally satisfied. The men of greatest influence in the Connection would, I am sure, unite with me; and every deviation from the Church of England would be done away." In all probability, had the plan met the approval of the leaders of the Church of England, it would have been formally presented, for Dr. Coke had the support of some of his oldest and wisest associates. "I have no doubt," said he, "they would lay down their lives with joy if they could see so happy a plan accomplished." Said Mr. Pawson, one of the Wesleyan leaders, in 1793: "We should consider our present circumstances and endeavor to agree upon some method by which our people may have the ordinances

of God and at the same time be preserve from division. I care not a rush whethe it be Episcopal or Presbyterian." Probabl many others as well "cared not a rush" pro vided something might be done that woul make for security and the continuance o the work.

The suggestion, however, was refused b the archbishop to whom the Bishop of Lon don with guarded approval had submitte it. Its merits were not considered; neithe were they denied nor referred to in th answer. The reason for this step towar unity possibly unwisely advanced by Dr Coke—the prejudice of his people "against receiving the Lord's Supper from the handl of immoral clergymen"—and two or three details in the plan that might easily hav been modified were given as the cause of it rejection.

What might have happened had this over ture been received and acted upon sincerely and sympathetically, no man can say. Pos sibly the divisions of the Church of Chris have become a part of the wrath of man that God has made to praise him, the dis cordant notes that make for higher harmony in some great outburst of praise—possibly Possibly they have been the shame and

enigma of Christendom. Possibly they are doomed to be no more in some glorious day after to-morrow. "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father"; when forms and merely verbal confessions of faith, sanctified shibboleths of all kinds, will be done away with—most surely such as have to do with the minute regulations of man, adopted too frequently by a bare majority vote in haste if not in anger. Dr. Coke used to say that he "would not have a hand in anything that would tend to a division in the societies for ten thousand worlds." The same spirit undoubtedly moved him to work for reunion wherever such division existed. He waited not for some humbler brother to say the word or do the deed, that he might see how some venturesome step would be considered before expressing himself; he had no thought of the effect of his action upon his own standing, whether he might because of it be the less or the more acceptable to his brethren; he was not enamored of the charms of the Delphic oracle. He saw clearly and spoke truly and left the results to his God.

It was this spirit that led him to take em-

phatic stand in the South against negro slavery. In his journal for May 26, 1785, he writes: "Mr. Asbury and I set off for General Washington's. We were engaged to dine there. . . . After dinner we opened to him the grand business, presenting to him our petition (agreed upon by the late Conference) for the emancipation of the negroes, and entreating his signature, if the eminence of his station did not render that inexpedient. He informed us that he was of our sentiments, and had signified his thoughts on the subject to most of the great men of the State; that he did not see it proper to sign the petition; but if the Assembly took it into consideration he would signify his sentiments to the Assembly by a letter." In 1784, at the Christmas Conference, the question was asked, "What methods can we take to extirpate slavery?" The answer given was: "We are deeply conscious of the impropriety of making new terms of communion for a religious society already established, excepting on the most pressing occasion; and such we esteem the practice of holding our fellow creatures in slavery. We view it as contrary to the golden law of God, on which hang all the law and the prophets, and to the inalienable

rights of mankind, as well as every principle of the Revolution, to hold in the deepest debasement, in a more abject slavery than is, perhaps, to be found in any part of the world except America, so many souls that are capable of the image of God." Surely these are the deeds and the words of a leader. He sees where influence may best be secured and moves forward to secure it; he speaks in no uncertain way regarding what he believes to be wrong, and yet with great consideration for those who differ with him. Not every leader or every Conference has been equally conscious of the "impropriety of making new terms of communion for a religious society already established." He was a bishop indeed.

Yet he will ever be best remembered—or should be—as the founder of Methodist missions. "Only let them be informed," writes he of the missionaries of 1804, "that they may correspond with me as their friend and father in the most friendly and familiar manner."

He was a bishop indeed, and therefore the friend and father of missions and missionaries. In all respects he was a leader.

CHAPTER IX

THE FOUNDER OF WESLEYAN MISSIONS

THOMAS COKE must be brought back by a grateful Church more heartily and more generally than he has been to his place among her missionaries. He must be given the honor that should never have been denied him. He is preëminently the founder of Methodist missions.

He could not well have been anything else. He was living in the day and in the place and among the conditions that called for leadership, and, by the grace of God, was uniquely qualified by his characteristics of temper and thought. His visions were ever large and insistent: his ambitions knew no limit. He could say that he was willing "to be anything or nothing, as the Lord pleased; to be employed or laid aside as he judged proper." He could say so, and did; yet could write immediately after this sentence of humility and trust, "I had sincerely loved God for many years, and had no ambition but to be the instrument, immediately or remotely, of converting millions to him."

He could talk about being "laid aside" one moment, and the next about his dream through his agency of the conversion of millions.

Yet, if he dealt with millions in his dream, he painstakingly cared for units in the prosaic work of everyday life. "I cannot repent," writes he, "of the thousands of hours which I have spent in at once the most vile, most glorious drudgery of begging from house to house. The tens of thousands of pounds which I have raised for the missions, and the beneficial effects thereof, form an ample compensation for all the time and all the labor." He could dream of continents and millions of converts; he could spend day after day—"thousands of hours"—as a beggar from house to house seeking the gifts of the rich and the poor.

He loved the common people; by nature an aristocrat, by the grace of God and compelling circumstance a man of the people. He gladly worked among the negroes in the West Indies, the Indians on our frontier, the most degraded and debased of men and women wherever he might find them. On January 5, 1787, he writes of his work in Antigua: "I have preached in the town twice a day; the house full half an hour

before the time. Our society in this island is near two thousand; but the ladies and gentlemen of the town have so filled the house that the poor dear negroes who built it have been almost entirely shut out except in the mornings. . . . Last week my brethren and self were invited by the company of merchants to dine with Prince William Henry." One day with the "poor dear negroes," the next with the heir to the English throne!

His emotions were deep and abiding. When he found that he could not command the assent of his brethren to his plans for missionary work in India, his heart was well-nigh broken. He wept as he walked along the streets to his lodgings; he spent the entire night on the floor in humble prayer to God; he cried from the depths of a troubled soul for the salvation of a people thousands of miles away. The next morning he came to the Conference determined to make one more plea. He spoke of the guiding hand of Providence; of the obligation of the Church to carry the gospel news to the nations that knew not the Lord, and then offered "to dare with himself the dangers of the enterprise," saying that he was "prepared to defray the expenditure

necessary to the outfit and commencement of the work to the extent of six thousand pounds." He so loved the common people, the outcast and the heathen, that others had to love them too. 'Tis needless to say the Conference granted that appeal, and that the missionary conception in its largeness and glory was received that hour for the first time by our Church.

He cared mainly for results. He had no great concern how they were reached, or under whose leadership, provided God was honored. He never contended for the recognition that might rightly have been his after the death of Mr. Wesley. Even in Ireland, where for years he had been considered as leader, he took a subordinate position during the days of suspicion and apparent jealousy immediately following Mr. Wesley's death. When first he caught a vision of the possibility of work in India, and saw the apparent futility of hope of support on the part of his associates, he impulsively turned to the Church of his youth. He offered himself as bishop for India—and sought such position and recognition from the Church of England. He who had been the inspiration of hundreds of societies of the Wesleyan Connection, who was

ranked among them as first superintendent if not bishop, who was recognized by many as John Wesley's successor in fact if not in name, dared to risk his reputation and if necessary to break with the associates of his maturer years for the sake of the larger Church of Christ and the advancement of his kingdom. "I am not so much wanted in our Connection at home," writes he to William Wilberforce, "as I was. . . . There is nothing to influence me much against going to India but my extensive sphere for preaching the gospel. . . . I am not conscious that the least degree of ambition influences me in this business. I possess a fortune of about twelve hundred pounds a year, which is sufficient to bear my traveling expenses and to enable me to make many charitable donations. . . . I sincerely believe that my strong inclination to spend the remainder of my life in India originates in the divine will, whilst I am called upon to use the secondary means to obtain the end." And to him they were secondary: the Church of Christ first, his own Church or societies next. He cared for results. He was ready to let the credit for his achievement go where it might go. All that he wanted was to get the story of his Lord clearly told to men who had never

heard it. The result was all-important; not the means used to attain it.

It is not to be wondered at that he was ever conscious of the presence of his Lord. "He alone began it," he writes, "he alone increased it, and, if I may presume so to express myself, he has bound himself to support it. He therefore, before I sailed, said to the North, 'Bring forth,' and to the South, 'Keep not back.' The West also is coming forward. The sister island has taken the flame and the highly favored British Isles combine to spread our missions throughout the world. How light it has made my heart! Next to union and communion with my God, nothing could afford me such high satisfaction. I hasten to Asia with alacrity and joy; and yet must confess that if the clouds had been ever so obscure, if all human aid had apparently been withdrawn from those missions, the interests of which are so deeply interwoven with the very strings of my heart, my divine call to Asia has been so indubitably clear that I should have been obliged to throw everything into the hands of my God and to say to him, 'Here I am; send me to Asia.'"

Surely, then, Thomas Coke was su-

premely endowed by God with the gifts and graces that make the great missionary. He failed not to use them. His name will ever be associated with the West Indies and with India. England, Ireland, and America may lay claim to him; others can claim as well and as justly. The world was his parish in fact as well as plan or prayer. His second trip to America brought him providentially to the West Indies. He had planned to go to Nova Scotia, having heard of the need of Wesleyan work there. The storms of the wild Atlantic drove his little vessel far toward the South, and he entered the open door of opportunity. Ever after this the West Indies were strangely dear to him. He knew and loved both islands and people. The Barbados, Jamaica, Saint Eustatius, Saint Vincent, Saint Kitts are names that were suggestive to him of tender associations. "If I were to turn hermit," writes he, "I should fix on this place, where I could fix an observatory on one of the peaks and spend my time in communion with God and in the study of astronomy and botany."

His tendencies, however, were of another character. He had no desire to "turn hermit," no matter what he might say re-

garding the charms of a solitary life. He was ever among the people. He visited from island to island, preaching, teaching, settling controversies, and holding conferences. The minutes of a Conference held with the preachers of the Windward Islands during Dr. Coke's fifth trip to America show that there were twelve preachers present, representing a membership in the societies of between six and seven thousand. A large proportion of this number was made up of negroes. "They have been brought out of heathenish darkness more or less to a knowledge of the truth and of themselves. They have left, so far as we can find," writes he, "all their outward sins, even polygamy itself; and a considerable part of them give so clear and rational an account of their conversion and of the influence of religion upon their hearts and lives as is exceedingly animating and encouraging to their pastors."

It is with India, however, that his name will ever be associated. He was never permitted to reach her shores, for he died and was committed to the mercy of the waves of the Indian Ocean—to the sea that with all other seas of mystery at the last must give up its dead. He died on his errand

of holy conquest, but his work can never die. Said he in the last sermon he preached in England, about to set sail with seven other missionaries: "Let me furthermore beseech you not to estimate the probability of our success by the insignificance of the instruments; the work is of God. There was a time when Christianity itself had in all human probability less to hope. The powers which now favor us were hostile to it; and yet in three hundred years it rose upon the ruin of paganism. Who can say that a similar result may not take place among the millions of India, whose future generations shall rise up and call us blessed?"

On the 30th of December, 1813, he set sail for the shores of Ceylon. In his ship there were four hundred people. "We have among us," writes he, "some Portuguese, natives of India. I wish we may be useful to them. In the dining-room our number is twenty-six, including the captain and his two officers. They are very polite; but, O, we want to save souls."

Travel in those early days of missionary venture was not what it is now. The seas were more to be dreaded; for the tempests were not met amid the security that men

feel to-day. On the 19th of January one of the merchant ships sailing with them was heard firing guns of distress. She was never afterward seen or heard of. On the 24th six more ships were missing, one of them a large Indiaman, the Fort William. A little later he writes: "We had the melancholy sight of a sailor belonging to another vessel falling from the topgallant yard into the sea. It does not appear that he could be saved by any exertions." A little later the wife of one of the missionaries sickened and died; and then a little later God came to call Thomas Coke.

At half-past five on the morning of the 3d of May, 1814, the messenger who came to arouse him, getting no answer, pushed open the door and found him dead upon the floor. He had not been ill for any length of time; indeed, no one thought that his illness was of a serious nature. The surgeon on the ship said that death was occasioned by apoplexy. That day, late in the afternoon, the burial service was read, and all that was mortal was committed to the waves.

In the priory church at Brecon, his birthplace, there is an epitaph, though his body lies not there. The monument was erected

in 1828 by the "ministers and missionaries with whom he was united." It bears testimony to his zealous ministry; his generosity; his unremitting vigor; to his leadership in the cause of Wesleyan missions. It says much, and other monuments say much—not the least a grateful Church; yet Thomas Coke must ever be considered among the living and not the dead. Such men can never die.

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Upham, Francis Bourne, 1862–

Thomas Coke, by Francis Bourne Upham. New
Eaton & Mains; Cincinnati, Jennings & Graham [c]

128 p. front. (port.) 16½ x 9½ cm.

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